Integrating Contemplation and Action

Blessed Maria Droste zu Vischering
1863 - 1899
Introduction

Though the Canonization process of Blessed Maria Droste was suspended, we continue to be highly motivated to work on the theme “Integrating contemplation and action in the life of Blessed Maria Droste zu Vischering”. In fact, this theme was a central topic in her religious life.

Sr. Gudula Busch, our German expert on Maria Droste, speaking at the centenary of her death on June 1999, captured the essence of her integration of the apostolic and contemplative dimensions as follows:

“Maria had an unusually active apostolic life firmly grounded in contemplation and mysticism. She had to dig deep to find the well in the desert that prevented her from drying out in the heat of hard routine.” (Centering life, p.4)

“Integration of contemplation and action” is obviously also the lifelong task for each of us and a permanent challenge in our lives. Bl. Maria Droste also knew these difficulties and struggled with them.

How do we experience the challenge of integrating contemplation and action?

We are now offering you some selected passages from the documents of Blessed Maria Droste to help understand her spirituality.

This is followed by 62 personal testimonies of our Sisters and Mission Partners, who kindly agreed to share their particular experiences in trying to integrate contemplation and action in their lives. Among them Sr. Gudula Busch has shared her personal lifelong devotion to Blessed Maria Droste.

These stories reveal a variety of faith journeys and apostolic experiences. They encourage a renewal of apostolic zeal and open up new perspectives for risking together for Mission.

We would like to express our gratitude to our Sisters and Mission Partners who openly shared their personal testimonies and to the Sisters who were generously available to revise and translate them into 3 Congregational languages as English, French and Spanish: Srs. Juliana Devoy (USA), Denise Deschamps (France), Marie-Hélène Halligon (France), Adriana Perez (Mexico), Anne Josephine Carr (UK), Leticia Cortés (Chile), Marie Françoise le Brizaut (France), Armelle Dehennault (France), Marta Ceballos (USA), Sharon O’Grady (USA), Rosa Hernandez (Mexico-USA) and Alexandra Eisenkratzer (Germany).

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Sr. Theresa Kim (South-Korea) and Spirituality Centre Team
Reflections of Blessed María Droste
Maria Droste prior to her entry into religious life

- Maria Droste described the development of her vocation before entering the convent:

“Our desire to enter a convent was still rather vague; however I remember as I grew older the desire grew stronger, to belong totally to the beloved Saviour. When I was 14 years old, the words: “You should love the Lord, your God, with your whole heart” made a tremendous impression on me. I thought: father and mother who were the epitome of perfection for me also love the dear Lord but as they love themselves and their children, their hearts don’t belong entirely and solely to God; back then I immediately realised that the dear Lord asked of me an undivided heart, and the vocation to religious life became clear to me. In the same sense and spirit the dear Lord then continued to guide me. My only burning desire was to belong to my beloved Saviour; it seemed to me that he was inviting me, and all the words related to this subject seemed to be spoken to me, e.g. the words to Peter: ‘Do you love me more than these... etc.’”

- Before entering the convent Maria Droste already felt a strong inner inclination to the contemplative life:

“My yearning for the convent increased more and more, especially as my parents had given their consent long ago. At that time it was my desire to go to the missions, later I felt a greater inner longing for contemplative life. Ill health kept me at home for years. However my encounters with the dear Saviour became ever deeper. I ardently felt his love and only he knows the intimate conversations we had with each other, especially during the exposition of the Blessed Sacrament. When a Jesuit priest told me that I would soon die of consumption, it was very hard for me then not to be able to enter the convent but the thought to be consumed as a sacrifice of love for my heavenly spouse filled me with inexpressible consolation. (I had already pronounced the vow of chastity long ago).”

“My tendency toward the contemplative life is still the same as before and herein lies the greatest cross for me. But I will be content with the will of God.”

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2 Ibid., p.10
3 Ibid., p.11
Maria Droste in the Novitiate in Münster, Germany

“My vocation is to be a religious of the Good Shepherd; to achieve this aim is my only duty. Everything has to be related to it because that is the will of God for me; if I like it or not. I need prayer and meditation, in order to live out of Jesus, obedience towards the rule and superior, in order to live through Jesus, recollection, in order to live in Jesus and for Jesus. I need to forget myself, in order to think only of God and souls.”

• As a novice Maria Droste expressed her inner tendency to her superior:

“For a long time I have felt more and more drawn to an inner life, to recollection, to walking in the presence of God, to inner contact with God. Meditation, Holy Communion, spiritual reading recreate my natural strength even though I often feel resistance there. Thus I am again driven to punctuality in obedience, to regularity and fidelity in small things.”

• In November 1890 Maria Droste wrote as a novice to her superior:

“For a long time now I have felt drawn to a contemplative life; the more I am nearing Holy Profession the more this inclination is growing. Especially during meditation, at holy communion, the reading and other spiritual exercises I believe I see ever more clearly that God is calling me to this; also all the divine inspirations and spiritual enlightenments aim at it. The grace of God is drawing me so tremendously that I cannot any longer doubt the call of God.”

Maria Droste after her Vows

• When Maria Droste, after making her vows, was constantly tempted regarding her vocation. She wrote in 1893:

“I will use the tendency towards the contemplative life by sacrificing it, in order to annihilate myself under the hand of God, to sanctify my outer work through the inner spirit and to see in everything the guidance of God.”

• From a letter of the year 1893 we take the following passage:

“It is as if I have been confronted anew with a choice:
1) To devote myself with all earnestness to the inner contemplative life and therein, as before, find consolation but also the suffering and discomfort (Regarding the latter I can say, that the dear Lord has given me many graces in prayer, whereby my physical strength was also severely affected).

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4 Abbot Ildefons Schober OSB, Some pages from the life of the Venerable Maria of the Sacred Heart. ibid., p.19-20
5 Ibid., p.48
6 Ibid., p.49
7 Ibid., p.38
2) Or to sacrifice this and to see in the outer tasks the will of God. The choice will be difficult because I know from experience how great a happiness it is to reach union with God in prayer. Only with a kind of nostalgia I can think back to these times. It often seems to me that the dear Lord is offering me also now this grace if I only would make a bit more of an effort. But the latter is too difficult for me or I know it is not compatible with all the other duties. Is it permitted to totally wear out one’s physical strength? If I go on with the inner life as before and at the same time have the class, then I can manage to be fully worn out in a short time. If I am permitted to do so then it is good. Your Honour will understand that it is difficult to be faced with such a choice. I feel like Esau who preferred lentil stew to his birthright. But if God wants it so then it is good. I only need to have clarity and also Your Honour needs to be clear in order to be able to guide me accordingly.”

- Maria Droste shares here the question of her heart with a sister:

“My dear Sister! When the dear Lord leads everything why does he leave me with this ever growing inclination to the contemplative life and is calling me to an active life?”

Maria Droste as Superior in Porto, Portugal

- In a letter of 24. 11. 1895 to Fr. Schober Maria Droste wrote how the word of God and silence uplift her soul from the low points in the apostolic service:

“With great tension, I can say with anxiety, I am awaiting a letter from the Mother House. Everything lies in God’s hand but the general opinion here and also there is that the superior (of Lisbon) will not return to Lisbon. This would be a shock for the house there, for our local house here and very especially for me personally. It could not hit us hardly any stronger. However God’s holy will may be done but pray! [...] The thought of the departure of the superior of Lisbon lay heavy on me. Today I was crushed. For the first time I am totally alone with the responsibility for both houses. We two discussed everything and supported each other, and how selflessly the superior always stood by me. Now I am totally isolated and in some points can nowhere ask for advice. Almost overwhelmed by the burden I went into the Chapel and opened the page in the Song of Songs, ‘I compare you, my love to a mare on Pharaoh’s chariots’. After half an hour new life came into the soul. The One who is holding the reins in his hands, knows where the way is leading to – may it be ever so dark and steep. If only the horses don’t resist the guide but move courageously forward in everything. As always in great trials the divine Spouse showed also today that he is with us despite the dark night.”

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8 Abbot Ildefons Schober OSB, Some pages from the life of the Venerable Maria of the Sacred Heart. ibid., p.53
9 Ibid., p.54
10 Ibid., p.75-76
• In the letter of 15. 10. 1895 Maria Droste wrote to Fr. Schober how she would let herself pour her gathered inner energies into her apostolic service:

“When the water is boiling the steam rises free and unhindered into the air; if you put a lid on it the steam sinks as drops of water. I have to do likewise, that is, to seek more and more to ignite the fire of divine love in my heart and to let it be consumed for the divine Spouse. When I am only with him in the hours of prayer and solitude, I can give free run to my love, despising earthly things, seeing them as nothing and dispatching from the heart everything which is not him. Then when the lid comes down, that is when my responsibilities bring me in contact with human creatures, then what I had gathered from my divine Spouse has to sink calmly and gently as refreshing drops of water and drizzle on all the souls with whom I am in contact during the day.”

• In the letter of 17. 2. 1896 to Fr. Schober, during her journey home to Germany, Maria Droste strikingly described how consciously she lived her mission and thereby connected it with the contemplative dimension:

“I surely look forward to seeing the parents and siblings again but would also be quite willing to abstain from it. [...] the journey takes its peaceful and joyous course. However, in my deepest heart I am longing for our poor Portugal and especially for the quiet cell beside the dear little chapel. Nothing in the world can replace this quiet little place ...”

• Fr. Ildefons Schober OSB, the spiritual guide of Maria Droste, expressed clearly how she connected the outer activity with the inner life:

“With the endless and exhausting outer works which made demands on the superior of the Good Shepherd from morning to night, it could seem likely that without a concentrated contemplation in God, an inner life would not be possible for her. We see the opposite, namely that the docile religious woman not only led a rich inner life but that the life in God increased at the same degree as she seemed to lose herself totally and dutifully in outer activities. No work and no activity could wrest her from walking in God’s presence. The superior contemplated each incident whether big or small, whether of a joyful or distressing nature, in the light of faith.”

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11 Abbot Ildefons Schober OSB, Some pages from the life of the Venerable Maria of the Sacred Heart. ibid., p.80
12 Ibid., p.108
13 Ibid., p.75
Testimonies
# Table of Contents

Testimony 1 - Sr. Gudula Busch / Germany ................................................................. 12  
Testimony 2 - Sr. Juliana Devoy / USA ................................................................. 13  
Testimony 3 - Sr. Theresia Byrne / Ireland ................................................................. 14  
Testimony 4 - Sr. Clare Nolan / USA ................................................................. 16  
Testimony 5 - Sr. Celina De Souza / India ................................................................. 18  
Testimony 6 - Sr. M. Gabriela S. Botelho / Portugal ................................................ 20  
Testimony 7 - Sr. M. Lucilia Marques / Portugal .................................................... 21  
Testimony 8 - Sr. Pamela Marie Volland / USA ..................................................... 22  
Testimony 9 - Sr. Filomena Reis / Portugal ............................................................. 23  
Testimony 10 - Sr. Mauraid Moran / Ireland ............................................................ 24  
Testimony 11 - Sr. Jenny Coyne / Ireland ............................................................... 25  
Testimony 12 - Sr. Maisie Nevin / Ireland ............................................................... 26  
Testimony 13 - Sr. Winifred Donlon / Ireland ........................................................... 27  
Testimony 14 - Anonymous / Ireland ................................................................. 28  
Testimony 15 - Sr. Carmel Smith / Ireland .............................................................. 29  
Testimony 16 - Mr. Michael Shanahan / USA .......................................................... 30  
Testimony 17 - St. Martha’s Hospital Community in Bangalore / India .................... 32  
Testimony 18 - Sr. Margarida Azevedo / Portugal ................................................... 33  
Testimony 19 - Srs. Lurdes, Teresa Santos, Olinda Bastos - Murtal Community / Portugal .... 35  
Testimony 20 - Sr. Rita Maria Urbanski / Germany ............................................... 36  
Testimony 21 - Ms. Chelsea VanOrden / USA ......................................................... 37  
Testimony 22 - Ms. Katie Delaney / USA ............................................................... 39  
Testimony 23 - Sr. Lucia Tindo / Soudan ............................................................... 41  
Testimony 24 - Sr. Hedwig Jöhl / Switzerland ......................................................... 42
Testimony 25 - Sr. Marie Françoise le Brizaut / France ................................................................. 43
Testimony 26 - Sr. Armelle Dehennault / France .................................................................. 44
Testimony 27 - Sr. Maria José Moniz / Portugal ..................................................................... 45
Testimony 28 - Sr. Celina Fraga / Portugal ........................................................................... 46
Testimony 29 - Sr. Belmira Pereira / Portugal ....................................................................... 47
Testimony 30 - Sr. Annunciata Gatt / Malta ........................................................................... 48
Testimony 31 - Sr. Marie Paul Richard / France .................................................................... 50
Testimony 32 - Province of Egypt-Sudan .................................................................................. 52
Testimony 33 - Sr. Bernadette D’Eurveilher / Réunion ......................................................... 54
Testimony 34 - Sr. Julia Sohasy /Réunion ............................................................................ 55
Testimony 35 - Communities and novices of Senegal ............................................................. 56
Testimony 36 - Sr. Marie Claire Puthiath / India .................................................................... 58
Testimony 37 - Sr. Madeleine Guigue / France ...................................................................... 60
Testimony 38 - Sr. Marie Hélène Halligon /France .................................................................. 61
Testimony 39 - Sr. Edith Justeau /France ............................................................................... 62
Testimony 40 - Sr. Andrea Tillmanns /Germany ..................................................................... 63
Testimony 41 - Sr. Carmela Rodríguez / Peru .......................................................................... 65
Testimony 42 - Sr. Mary Aurora Centeno Sánchez / Mexico ................................................... 66
Testimony 43 - Sr. Margarita Rodríguez Olguín / Mexico ....................................................... 68
Testimony 44 - Sr. Nidia Quesada / Costa Rica ...................................................................... 69
Testimony 45 - Sr. Iris Rojas Rojas / Costa Rica ................................................................... 70
Testimony 46 - Sr. Ligia Barrantes / Costa Rica .................................................................... 71
Testimony 47 - Sr. María Elena Quesada Sancho / Costa Rica ............................................... 72
Testimony 48 - Sr. Marina Ureña / Costa Rica ....................................................................... 73
Testimony 49 - Ms. Ana Isabel Hernández Navarro / Costa Rica ............................................. 74
Testimony 50 - Ms. Ana Isabel Hernández Navarro / Costa Rica

Testimony 51 - Srs. Iara Pessoa de Oliveira, Maria do Céu Bastos / Brazil

Testimony 52 - Sr. María Teresa Lemos / Brazil

Testimony 53 - Ms. Yolanda Barrios Mora / Costa Rica

Testimony 54 - Sr. Marta Villalobos Torres / Costa Rica

Testimony 55 - Province of Spain

Testimony 56 - Sr. Clara Maria / Mexico

Testimony 57 - Sr. María de la Luz González Díaz / Mexico

Testimony 58 - Sr. María Teresa Vargas Pacheco / Costa Rica

Testimony 59 - Community Santa María Eufrasia / Peru

Testimony 60 - Sisters and Mission Partners / Honduras

Testimony 61 - Sr. María Leticia Cortés M / Chile

Testimony 62 - Sr. María Angélica Guzmán Vicuña / Chile
Dear Sisters and Friends,

I was requested by Sr. Theresa Kim to write my personal views concerning Maria Droste zu Vischering as an active-contemplative Good Shepherd Sister.

I appreciate doing this all the more as I owe my perseverance in the Order to “my” Maria. Already as a novice I had the privilege of being allowed to transcribe all the writings and documents for the process of beatification. Little did I know at the time that Maria would pursue me for more than 50 years.

On the one hand, during the many hours of copying, an image evolved in my mind of the woman whom we revere today as “Blessed”. On the other hand she was also a fully normal Good Shepherd Sister with lots of work, relatively little time for prayer and study of spiritual writings. She had a striking personality with rough edges. Please, let her be as she was and do not tie the halo too tight around her.

Only a very few people knew that she had deep mystical experiences until her early death. She did not talk about them. Jesus and she had become one. Because of this she could present herself with confidence to all, could counsel people, interpret creatively the then petty religious customs etc. She literally worked herself to death and loved without limit.

As a young religious who entered before Vatican II, I thought, “if this Maria mastered religious life, then I can do it too.” And thus I persevered in spite of several crises. This was and is my great joy. Today I look back with gratitude on 61 years of religious life.

In old age our actions are sometimes limited. But we can all love to the end.

I am already looking forward to reading of your personal experiences on our Good Shepherd website.
Many years ago when I entered the Good Shepherd Congregation as a freshly graduated 17 year old we were a semi-contemplative and semi-cloistered congregation. I knew very little about religious life and even less about our congregation but I was captivated by the photos on a vocation brochure. It was entitled, “Winning the Teenager” and depicted in pictures everything that spoke to my heart – the sisters praying in choir, the work to bring back young girls gone astray and the foreign missions.

Although at that time I was too young to appreciate it in later years I did and I will be forever grateful for the formation I received. Our prayer life was central and our community life was very structured but it made for a very healthy lifestyle. At the same time everything was for the sake of “the girls”. They were our treasure and the whole purpose of our existence as a congregation. I will never forget how thrilled I was when, as a second year novice, I was allowed to go to “the class” and be with the girls.

When I finally fulfilled my dream of going to the missions my life in Hong Kong couldn’t be more different from the life I was introduced to when I entered. When I wasn’t struggling to learn Chinese I was working with very challenging teenagers. But I loved it. Still we Sisters had our own building and prayer and community activities.

In Macau where I’ve been living for the last 28 years the situation is even more different. Our service is a crisis centre and we more or less share the lives of the women and children who come to live with us. We have our own quarters but very little privacy as we are so close to the main house and are back and forth all the time as we share meals and our chapel is in the big house. Over the years we have been able to touch the lives of so many people in a variety of distressful situations – victims of domestic violence, pregnant teens, foreign women coming out of prison, trafficking victims, women whose husbands committed suicide and so many more... I believe it is the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist in our chapel and the presence of the Sisters living here that accounts for whatever success we’ve had. It is so faith building to see so many families who once lived with us have now moved on to a happy future.

Personally it is the support of community that helps me to keep from being swallowed up in activity as there is always so much going on. Our community, even though few, is very faithful to personal and community prayers. Ever since the “Year of the Eucharist” we have a half hour of adoration every day before Evening Prayer. Many years ago we started to center our community on the Word of God and we have gospel sharing once a week. The adoration of the Eucharist and the sharing of the Word of God, even though sometimes we are so distracted or not well prepared, is such a blessing. The biggest challenge is to find time for spiritual reading. Nevertheless I experience how my Vow of Zeal expressed in my service to these people and my prayer life nourish each other and fill me with great joy and gratitude.
In my daily struggle of integrating contemplation and action it is consoling to read that Maria Droste “had to dig deep to find the well in the desert that prevented her from drying out in the heat of dark routine”. Many others shared Maria’s dilemma, St. Dominic, Johann Eckhart, Catherine of Siena, to name just a few. In my personal experience as I sit here writing I hear the Angelus bells toll, the bell which should connect me with God but in my inner self I continue to write. I know the theory, “without prayer I can do nothing useful but without going out serving others my prayer becomes stale.”

Each morning I sit down in our little Oratory and put into practice all I have learned about Christian Meditation but quickly my mind becomes a hive of activity when I fix my programme for the day and solve all the major problems that may arrive in my octogenarian life in case the Lord cannot manage. After spending 50 years in Africa I returned home determined to start a real life of contemplation with the lofty ideal of putting everything in the hands of God. However, having more time did not solve my problem, and I still live a large proportion of my life in Egypt and Sudan.

Two years ago I was blessed to find a John Main’s Prayer Group led by a real expert in Meditation, a lay woman, who prays with and teaches a group of approximately 30 men and women each week for over a two hour period and encourages us to practice at least one hour on a daily basis. This is a difficult programme to persevere in over a lifetime but one can only keep trying.

St. Catherine of Siena tells us in order to preach, the Word must be born in us and how will this be brought about other than by prayer and contemplation. We have a wonderful example in the story of Mary and Martha. Mary was absolutely absorbed in her contemplation of Jesus sitting at his feet listening to his every word while Martha was busy preparing a meal for Jesus. It would seem that Mary should have given a little of her time helping Martha and Martha should have given some time listening to Jesus. Like Mary and Martha we never seem to get it right. I am sure I would have been in the kitchen helping Martha rather than sitting still at the feet of Jesus.

We all know that Prayer is essential in our lives. St. M. Euphrasia told her Sisters, “You will never work efficaciously for souls if you have not first drawn from Prayer and Silence the lights that are so necessary.” Yet, keeping the balance requires a real effort. I know the theory well. In Prayer, I meet Christ and in Him all human suffering; in service, I meet people and in them the suffering Christ. But the struggle is always there.

Prayer is a daily challenge. For me it has not got easier over the years but I know it is a discipline I must pursue each day. I think my personal problem is not the amount of work I have to do, at this stage of my life, but the endless time I take planning that work and crying over mistakes that I think might have been avoided and this not only at the present moment but
years gone by. Integrating contemplation and action should not be such a problem if I could be more accepting of what goes on in my life on a daily basis.

I am fully aware that prayer should be my main focus in my life at present. Hopefully like the Magi I may be able to change my route and go home by another road.
CONTEMPLATION AND ACTION: UNITED IN SOLIDARITY

I think it is very natural to integrate “contemplation” and “action,” although it may be a puzzle to know what these terms really signify to any given person at any given time. Especially considering that within my own heritage of western culture and patriarchal church, I have inherited a mindset that has prized hierarchy and supported dualistic mindsets for centuries; thus, a false dichotomy can exist that works against true unity.

Dichotomy however, is not in the tradition given to us in the gospels. Jesus’ life is a dynamic cycle of healing and going apart, of dialogue, questioning, and searching his own identity within a larger grasp of the mission to bring good news to the poor (Lk4:18). Gospel integration can be seen in the story of the Samaritan woman: can one really say if Jesus is engaged in compassionate outreach or in contemplative dialogue? I think not. And I wonder if going out in the fishing boats, for Jesus, was action or contemplation, teaching or reflection? Doing or discovering sacred mystery?

In our time we are understanding the whole of creation in wondrous new lights as physicists and mystics converge on sacred insights; in these, neither action or contemplation are placed against the other, just as neither science nor spirituality contradict one another. Each element – contemplation and action – is in dynamic relation one to the other - each feeding off the other and enlarging its own significance from vital contact with the other. Our congregation, since 1970s, has been explicitly called to a commitment to gospel Justice. Solidarity is a social principle at the heart of justice that has been highlighted in the post-Vatican II church. Solidarity gives a framework that readily corresponds with the integrated living of sound biblical tradition and contemporary teaching about the spiritual cosmos and that defeats the notion that action-contemplation are separate entities.

Solidarity begins within the heart, usually a feeling evoked by the suffering of another; it touches something that we know of our own vulnerability and allows us to identify with and enter into the experience of that “other” who is suffering. Sometimes the feeling passes and become nothing more than an emotion. But when nurtured by scripture and prayer, it can transform into a real relationship of compassion that remains within our innermost meditative experiences where we come to know the Divine; at the same time, the depth of our identity with the other also sparks us to act on behalf of the other. It may begin with material relief from suffering. But even good works (works of mercy) are not enough. Solidarity goes further. It finds a place of union, in both action and prayer, where I am with the other - where I endure the distress, the suffering, the hopelessness of another. Where I can become fully myself with an open heart and the other can become fully the “Other,” advancing a manifestation of incarnation and salvation.
Solidarity does not pit activity against contemplation; it enriches all action with contemplation and infuses true contemplation with precise relational action on behalf of transforming energy in the world. Yes, this mostly happens quite slowly as we work within the limitations of human and personal grief, desire, anxiety, and weakness.

We have our own exemplar undermining dichotomy in Mary Euphrasia. I think of the story I have been told of how she would write business letters in her choir stall during the solemn reflection time after reception of the Eucharist! So I think, integration sometime requires merely trusting myself and the spiritual impulses I experience - sometimes a call to withdrawal to a still point of encounter with mystery and meditation; other times a pull to go forth in a flurry of activity on behalf of another. Eventually, in the dynamism, I can recognize that the still point is in the midst of the storm just as turbulence contains all there is of sacred stillness. It can be supported by paying attention to life around me, following the example of the gospels, and learning from the great women of our congregation, some of whom may be right beside me!
I owe my gratitude to my late parents for a religious family background of Christian values and for their missionary spirit. This upbringing has enabled me to integrate contemplation and action from my childhood to this date. The more I leap into the unknown, the more I am energized by the Spirit to brave many different and often difficult situations.

1974 – 1995: Contemplation flowed into action without isolating me from others in the Mission of our Province/Congregation. This included: health ministry, prison ministry, girls and women in difficulty, helping the marginalized poor in rural areas and pastoral care. It was a journey of being in communion with the Lord, which demanded a lot of self-sacrifice, a “let go” attitude, a firm will, a team spirit and the willingness to learn from others while allowing others to grow.

1995 – 2001: In our Mission at Senegal, West Africa, in the Providence of God, I was able, together with our collaborators, to reach out to the needy. Challenging moments with vulnerable groups brought me closer to God and very appreciative of the uniqueness of every person I encountered.

In my 42 years of consecrated life, I’ve had several inspiring God experiences which helped me to grow into a deeper relationship with Christ. I wish to share with you two such experiences where I risked my life

Our Crisis Intervention Centre in Bangalore for girls and women in difficulty is surrounded by several shops. Once, very early in the morning, there was a short circuit in the shop adjacent to our Centre. I saw the sparks of fire through my window. Without any panic, I called the fire brigade. Then I woke up the girls, women and their children who were fast asleep. We all vacated our residence. The fire brigade was prompt to arrive and put out the fire. We were unharmed, and the other shops which remained closed at night were found to be intact, except the shop with the short circuit. All items were burnt.

Our Prison Ministry in Senegal –
I was attending the court to prove the innocence of two pregnant women who were arrested. My final appointment with the lawyer happened to be the day of Presidential canvassing in the town, the roads were blocked. I drove back to the community and went on foot to join the turbulent youth known to me. They were throwing stones at passers-by. Knowing where I was headed, they asked me to follow them. I ran with them and reached the Court. The lawyer was waiting for me as he would be out of station for a long duration. Having gone through their files, the women were subsequently found not guilty. It was a joyful event to witness both pregnant women being released from the jail.
In January 2005, while I was actively involved with the students of our Slum Development Project in Mumbai, all of a sudden I had loss of vision in one eye. I was treated for Thromboembolism by a competent medical team. I accepted this tragic incident as God’s gift to cooperate in His New Plan for me of Action in Contemplation.

May 2005 – February 2016: As my health condition kept improving, I made a substantial contribution to the responsibilities entrusted to me in our St. Martha’s Hospital and the community of Bangalore.

In September 2015, I received a special grace during my Pilgrimage and Retreat at our Mother House in ANGERS. I responded generously to this new Missionary Call a 2nd time to serve in the Mother House.

On 10th February 2016, I joined our International community at the Mother House. St. Mary Euphrasia who has called me, makes everything possible for me to serve in her House – good health and all that is required for the Mission. I am happy and content in my missionary call.

Energized by the Spirit, I continue to be generous, giving myself wherever I am needed. I go on foot to the town for external work. Walking long distance keeps me physically and mentally fit. It is also an opportunity for me to be in solidarity with socially vulnerable people.

I conclude with the sentiments of St. Paul saying –

“For me to live, is Christ, to die is gain.
To hold His hand and walk the narrow way,
There’s no peace, no joy, no thrill
like walking in His will.”
I try to live this challenge, inspired by the truths of our faith that we are temples of God, sons and daughters of the same Father and brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. With the examples of St. Mary Euphrasia, St. John Eudes and Blessed Maria Droste before me I try to see in each person a child of God and a temple of God. I believe that God is present in the heart of every human being no matter what the person’s outward appearance may be and no matter what the person’s faults or defects may be. I am nourished in my efforts by prayer, and Lectio Divina, the reading of God's Word.

Daily, I like to see and contemplate the face of God, the face of Jesus Christ, in those whom I encounter on the road, on the bus, in the Church, or wherever I go, I like to look and contemplate those faces, often sad, sometimes hardened by the vicissitudes of life. I see pain or misery or hunger or the signs of addiction and so on. Often I find myself praying to the Father in heaven, speaking inwardly with Jesus the Good Shepherd for each person passing next to me without even knowing their problems, their troubles or afflictions. I am moved simply by the expression in the person’s eyes, the unshed tears or the stiffness in the expression on someone’s face.

When I come across a specific case, a need that is present, my mind begins to work, my heart to pray an earnest prayer to find some means to help and to find a solution to that person’s problem... If necessary, I try to contact other people who are in a better position to know how to help.

Out of many cases, here is one case that illustrates how I see contemplation and action: One day I got a call from a person who has been helped by the community in the past. He told me that his house would be mortgaged because of a contracted debt that he could not pay. I said: My God what can I do to prevent this poor family from being put out of their home? I prayed for light ... I contacted a person that could help and this person immediately sought other people in order to find a solution to the problem.

From my heart I try to make an altar on which I place the flame of a burning plea to God to help this poor fallen humanity. This humanity, to which we all belong, is so loved by God that he sent his only Son to give his life for us. These sheep going astray are the ones God has called me to offer my life for.

I think this is my way of integrating contemplation and action in my life...
I always like to think of the words of St. Paul to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 6:19):

"Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own?"

Thinking that I and each of my brothers and sisters are temples of God brings me to a deep respect for each person who as St. Mary Euphrasia says is “worth more than the whole world”.

In practice, I try to find sacred times of personal encounter with the Lord, then to find Him in each person. I do this by looking each and every one in the face and trying to put myself in tune with what they share with me, being attentive to their attitudes and words, their sorrows and joys. Basically, I make some effort to see God in others and then lead others to God through my concern for each one, talking to the Lord about these feelings and experiences.

I feel a great desire to be in communion with each person to whom I am sent. I do this by seeking to be available each time I meet that person and to be a presence of Christ who gave his life for each and every one, at the same time always asking the Lord to give His light and grace to strengthen my own frailty.

The witness of Sr. Mary of the Divine Heart has been inspiring for me.

This, in simple words, is the way I try to integrate contemplation in action, and action in contemplation.
Since the success of my efforts at anything largely depends on the strength of my motivation, I would like to describe my efforts at integrating contemplation and prayer with apostolic activity from this perspective. And this motivation, I have discovered, is inextricably bound up with my vow of zeal.

When I first started out in religious life, I was deeply convinced of the truth of St. Mary Euphrasia’s insistence on the intimate bond between the depth and solidity of our prayer life (or efforts at such) and genuine fruitfulness in the apostolate. So much so that I felt it was spiritual suicide to omit my prayer time.

As years of apostolic activity accumulated, an added incentive to fidelity in striving for this integration was the keen realization that I was absolutely powerless to achieve any sort of grace or gift of the Holy Spirit leading to a deeper conversion to the Lord either for myself personally or for those under our care—that all is grace, the work of the Holy Spirit. Yet I realized that an absolute and indispensable pre-requisite is continual effort on my part to be striving daily to be faithful. So my daily efforts at prayer, sensitivity to the Spirit’s workings etc. became a silent plea.

Lastly, in living out my vow of zeal, I find that the greatest assistance to this integration comes from my 4th vow itself. As I labor to bring those under our care to Jesus, --whether through sharing with them individually about the love that Jesus has for them personally, or helping them to open up the scriptures and the catechism, living out the Liturgical Year with them, praying together, teaching TOB, personal chats, interest in their families and their future plans or just being available and being a friend, I sense Jesus living and loving through me. I have often experienced His special assistance especially during so many years of missionary life when I’ve had to function using languages far different from my own.

As I move through my final years of life, while deeply grateful for abundant past graces received, I am aware that there is so much MORE that the Lord wants to do and give. The words of Our Lord to St. Angela of Foligno spur me on. He said: “make yourself a capacity and I will be for you an overflowing torrent”. Since, as Good Shepherd Sisters, our lives are intimately bound up with our vow of zeal, I think the Lord would say to us: “make yourselves a capacity and I will be, for you and those you serve, an overflowing torrent”. I pray that this torrent would inundate us all, set us on fire and overflow in grace to those we serve.
It is difficult to share the experience of these two dimensions of my spiritual life, "contemplation and action". However I will start by saying that I’ve always felt graced by God, loved and welcomed by His merciful love. Contemplation is a grace that the Lord offers me and I welcome it in my day to day life. Action is the gift offered to me following the meeting with Christ, the source of love. The grace and the gift are inseparably united and are the engine that drives my consecration and mission, giving consistency to my being and acting. In the beating of my heart I feel the heartbeat of Christ as the source and the rock of my consecrated life and my ministry.

In Christ is where I find my ardor and my action, sure that God calls me to be a channel of grace and of his merciful love to all those to whom I am sent.

This experience enables my fidelity to prayer and the moments of encounter with the Lord in the Sacraments, especially in the Eucharist, the food that fortifies me and in the Sacrament of Reconciliation when I receive my kind Father’s embrace that welcomes my misery and turns it into a channel of mercy and compassion for the needy.

This inner strength, this flame burning in me is the gift of God that challenges me on a day-to-day basis to get out of my comfort zone and leads me to prefer to go where Love is absent, where violence reigns, where so many live in loneliness and where the Lord is replaced by worldly goods. It is there that I feel I am an instrument of God. It is from these “disfigured faces” of Christ that my contemplation leads me beyond the limit into the concrete lives of the people and challenges me to continually return to Christ, the Source of love and to bring with me the pains, the sorrows and the joys of my students, my colleagues, the homeless, the broken families, the sexually exploited, the single mothers and their children, the abused children, women victims of violence, the elderly living alone, the sick, the young people seeking a new direction for their lives and all the people who will open their hearts looking for a friendly word and for consolation.

I conclude this testimony with the words of St. Paul, “I can do everything in Him who gives me strength".
Testimony 10
Sr. Mauraíd Moran / Ireland

From the very beginning of my life as a Good Shepherd sister, we were told that our institute was based on a contemplative, active charism and in practice that meant that all our activity was dedicated to the mission of bringing the Mercy of the Good Shepherd into all our contacts - especially with those entrusted to our care but also all our relationships - in community and elsewhere. This understanding of our vocation has kept me inspired and, I hope, faithful.
I could not let your request pass as it is only in recent years that I have come to realize that at the age of 13 or 14 Maria Droste’s story had a big influence on my vocation and probably is why I came to Our Lady of Charity. How did this come about? At the first retreat I ever made in my school there was a life of Maria Droste, together with other reading material, put out for us to read. Her great love for the Heart of Jesus made a deep impression on me as did her love for the troubled women of her time.

I had no intention of becoming a nun in those days but when that time came, work for the less privileged of this world was what I wanted to do and my devotion to the Sacred Heart had grown so much that I decided to make the first move towards finding out about St Michael’s Convent on the June feast of the Sacred Heart. Having finally made my decision I deliberately chose the feast of the Sacred Heart on 20th October to enter. This was the date that was traditionally kept by the Eudist family until 1972. And what name was I given at my reception? – Mary of the Sacred Heart – I had no say in this; I actually wanted Gemma, which in fact my sister was given years later.

I realise the above doesn’t really answer the request. However, I have no doubt that confidence in the Heart of Jesus upheld me over the years and kept me grounded when the going was rough, and still does.
After Vatican II, I did a renewal course during which time I received many graces and a lot of joy – a free gift from God. I felt impelled to share that joy with the women I met on the street and this led to the start of ‘Anawim’ – a project which has developed into a resource for women used by the courts as an alternative to prison.

In my daily life, silence, resting in the Lord and listening to His Spirit is very important to me. It makes a difference to my life. My heart is peaceful and it helps me to face the demands I meet, and with the grace of God, to show forth that peace and joy.

I know and believe more and more that I am loved by God, loved so richly and exuberantly by God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and this is what I try to bring to other people.

One day I met S. sitting at the bus stop. She was in her early 20s and had special needs. I sat down and said ‘hello’. S. started talking and telling me her story. I listened carefully. When she was finished talking, she stood up and gave me a big hug. I was so touched, it was as if Jesus Himself had hugged me. Pope Francis says we meet Jesus in the poor – this is just so true.
I agree that in my life I have found it a challenge to hold contemplation and action in some sort of balance. Yes, I’ve had a daily prayer routine and a life full of apostolic and other activity. Of necessity my activities demanded most, if not all, my energies. So often I came to prayer exhausted and distracted. There were of course other experiences of deep contact with the Lord when my spirits were restored and strengthened and these times were very precious to me. They gave me the grace to keep going – both with my prayer and my activity. And when it was at its best my prayer life inspired and undergirded my works! I found that spiritual reading had little place in my working life and I missed ‘Reading in the Refectory’ (when this ceased) and other sources of incidental spiritual input. On the whole silence and a quiet environment are no longer values. This leaves us an underlying atmosphere of distraction and busy noise, an increasingly common feature of modern life which makes a contemplative mind-set very difficult to sustain.

There are stages, of course, in the development of our prayer life, and now that I am old and beyond much activity I no longer experience that dichotomy between Prayer and Work and Life. I am given the time and space and I have the motivation to live a Life of Prayer. This, I see is the challenge of old age – to consolidate and integrate my life’s experience and to seek the Lord and live in His presence in an increasingly committed way. I feel there needs to be much more emphasis on BEING within our elderly communities and our Sisters need formation and support in this. Our lives have been so work-centred and just like people in society we have often defined ourselves by what we do rather than what we are! In old age we are given another opportunity to shift our focus and to deepen the realization of our true identity in Christ.
“He prayeth best, who loveth best. 
All things both great and small, 
for the dear God who loveth us He made and loveth all.”

Coleridge, one of the great English poets wrote the above a couple of centuries ago. These lines make one reflect on how one could simplify one’s life – they express an attitude of appreciation for all the good things that surround us. We can be like the psalmist praising God for the wonderful world He has given us.

Thus, living on a higher level we are better able to see things in their real perspective, ruling out ‘complaining and instead praising and thanking God at all times as St Paul exhorts us.

Being human our enthusiasm can fluctuate – we might not be always in a mood for ‘praising’ as much as we would like. Here St Peter helps us. He says – “Never pay back an angry word with another, instead pay back with a blessing”. – We are well rewarded – he says we thus inherit a blessing for ourselves.

Our day to day efforts to develop an attitude of prayer and praise leads to a greater freedom – freedom to love God and to love others. However, as the days and years go by we might begin to feel that the road we have chosen is not as easy or as simple as we had hoped. At this point it might help us to recall a quotation from Nelson Mandela, he said:

“The greatest glory in living lies not in never falling, but rising every time we fall.”
My integration of contemplation and action begins each day with saying the Morning Offering. By saying this prayer I offer up everything that I am going to do so that each action will be a prayer.

Living in an elderly community with no apostolate as such, means that my ministry is now to the Sisters. I try to be available to them in any way I can and I am glad to be able to do some small services. There is a poem which speaks of “the Saints in glory” and ends with “Living with the saints below is quite another story”.

It is important for me to reverence each Sister and to try to avoid being judgmental, especially in thought. I find it helpful to remember that each Sister receives Holy Communion every day and therefore for a little while is a living tabernacle. For me living my daily life in this way is contemplation in action.
My life began with the good fortune of loving parents and four siblings with whom I am still close. I have a loving spouse, Jenny, and two cherished sons, Aidan and Brendan, both freshmen at the moment, in college and high school respectively. I'm grateful to live in a peaceful home surrounded by trees and work in a job I love. In my role at Maria Droste Counseling Services I work with the hope and prayers—along with many other Mission Partners—of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, to carry on the Sisters' work alongside them. It is clear to me that I have many blessings for which to be thankful. Chief among them is a sense of, the ways God has shown me that I am loved. The most important work of my life is learning to take responsibility for that divine love by living out of it. The way I have articulated this reality is to say that I felt God telling me years ago, “I trust you, Mike.” It has taken me years to live into that trust, which I have come to understand as the foundation of integrating contemplation and action.

Integrating contemplation and action is perhaps the best way to summarize what I believe to be the grace and challenge of my adult life. I formerly thought of contemplation and action as mutually exclusive states of being, as if action takes one out of contemplation and contemplation is a break from action. The goal then would be to do enough contemplation that it can affect actions. That may be true, but I have learned that there is a more profound relationship between the two.

The awareness that I am trusted by God has meant two primary things to me: I am trusted because I am completely loved by God and, in a more profound way; I understand that everyone else on the planet is likewise loved in that all-encompassing way. The result of contemplation for me is coming back home to that awareness of God’s love and then bringing that awareness forward, into my day, into my interactions at home and work. When I am in that active state with the contemplative awareness brought forward, I live with joy. I see in those moments the apparent contradiction of me taking action, yet the Spirit working though me. My life is mine, yet I’m not on my own. I am choosing my actions, yet also participating in something that is much bigger than myself. Contemplation means tapping into the Spirit of life that unites all of us and rings with a sense of “this is who we all truly are” which then becomes the foundation out of which actions flow.
That is my articulation of how contemplation and action are integrated in me: they are not separate states of being. To remain in a state of contemplation while answering phones, commuting, responding to clients and coworkers, running from one meeting to the next, sometimes feeling the fatigue and stress of work and home life, and—even there—to be in awareness of how deeply I am loved, despite all evidence to the contrary at times.... Well, there is nothing on earth that could ever replace it. Contemplation in action is the joy of a quiet resource humming deep down in my psyche, always “on,” always broadcasting the same message of being loved and trusted by God. That love simultaneously reaches out as action, carrying with it the knowledge that others are likewise loved. I believe that the compassion extended toward others—the essence of contemplation in action—is always known by them at some level. Contemplation and action are like the yin and yang of life: they are seeming opposites that in actuality give rise to each other. My greatest joy is living with an awareness that they are interconnected in the here and now.
Testimony 17

St. Martha's Hospital Community in Bangalore / India

- Taking time for meditation and using the day's Gospel and readings, leads me to practice the inspiration from the Word of God in my daily activities.

- Contemplation helps me to be a better person, a composed person and this helps me to be more effective in my ministry.

- Contemplation helps me to be more aware of the presence of God in my life which helps me to be a little more like Jesus and I try to radiate His love and compassion in my daily life and mission.

- Contemplation helps me to have a positive outlook in my life, in spite of my own suffering; I am able to rise again for action.

- Contemplating the life of Christ, helps me to be humble, compassionate and empathetic towards the people with whom I work.

- Being aware of God’s help and timely intervention in my day-to-day life, makes me to experience His presence within me and around me. This helps me to pray for others, to help others, especially families in great difficulties.

- As I grow older in my religious life, I feel time is not enough to thank God for all the favours received and to pray for others. I am fully immersed in God’s love. I realize that God’s grace is much greater than all the troubles and struggles which I go through in my life and ministry.

- I get so immersed in prayer, sometimes, my personal prayer extends to two and half hours at a stretch.

- For me contemplation and action are inseparable – one leads to the other - it is my contemplation on Christ's life during His earthly life which compels me to go to the people, to share His love and compassion with them – it is their sufferings and struggles, their longing for relief and consolation, to live a dignified life which compel me to be at the feet of the Lord who strengthens and inspires me for suitable and timely action in my mission.
As a personal experience, contemplation in action is the only way I have found to grow in love for God and neighbor. So it is a daily challenge of constant listening to the will of God, thus:

- When I do something to transform or improve the world around me, for example, when I search for ways to make the world better through my effort, I also search with the "eyes of God," and for this I need to have a meeting with Him in personal prayer, especially contemplative prayer. The extension of that prayer leads me to apostolic action.

- When I discover God in the good and less good events that happen in every moment of my life and thank Him for the opportunity He gives me to grow.

- When I'm being able to recognize and accept all that happens as necessary and as God's plan for me, I'm just contemplating the interior work that God is doing in me and I will answer to His grace.

Contemplation in action takes away from me obstacles that before could not be seen, or contemplation takes me many times to action and not the other way around. When I think: "For your Kingdom, I am able to perform what I thought I did not have the ability to do "This thought makes me stronger and the action is more effective.

Contemplation in action is what makes me sensitive to laughter and the freshness of children, to the life experiences of the elderly. It makes me discover creative people, generous and honest people. It helps me to be humble and put myself in the place of the other person.

Contemplation in action helps me open my eyes to the suffering of people and makes me share with them the compassion of Christ for suffering humanity. It helps me to accept my weakness, to accept others and to contemplate the wonders of God in humanity.

Each time I have to share about my spiritual life I will seek to identify more closely with Jesus the Good Shepherd and this results in a very personal contemplative experience. This helps to cure me of my preoccupation with the future and instead to be aware of His constant presence and to seek to act as He would act.

The mission that God has entrusted to me here and now in the middle of a lot of poverty, drugs, poor living condition, prostitution etc. is to be a welcoming presence for everyone, talking about them to God and about God to them; with my testimony and bringing them hope.
In my experience the integration of contemplation in action is a way of prayer and a constant work that is never finished. And only in this deep relationship with God am I able to live intensely every moment that is given me as an image and likeness of God in the world and a sister of our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd.
Blessed Maria Droste Project

Testimony 19
Srs. Lurdés, Teresa Santos, Olinda Bastos
Murtal Community / Portugal

After sharing our experiences, we concluded that contemplation gives life to our action:

- When I am faced with a difficult situation, the first thing I do is ask Jesus what He would do if He were in my place. What would be the concrete answer He would give, what would be the attitude He would take... and, by listening to the Lord, I find the light and the strength to act.

- When I don’t have time to be near the Tabernacle, I try to be very attached to the Lord in the course of my activity, seeing Him and listening to Him in the people and events, and that makes me feel His presence very much!

- Because I like to sing and make music, I sing to Him in my work and I feel the Lord is there listening to my singing in the middle of my activities, and this brings me much inner peace and joy.

- I get support from the Gospel in order to integrate contemplation and work. I like seeing Jesus in His activities, and I also learn from Him when He takes refuge "at night" to talk to His father. He is the Lord of our two inseparable vocations: active and contemplative!

- My vow of zeal makes me be creative in dealing with difficulties; that’s why I like to see contemplation and action as challenges that are given to me so that I live out the deeper meaning of my mission...

- In everything I do, I try to do it out of love for Jesus and I feel I should join Him in His Passion, so that men recognize the love that God has for each person and his will to save everyone. Every day I pray to Jesus on behalf of those who suffer and those who are making their way to the Father. All of these people are part of my contemplation and action.

- I offer to Our Lady those who “kill”, so that our Mother will touch their hearts and convert them. This concern consumes me. “I’d like to be close to them and ask them to stop doing so much evil because God also loves them and wants to save them...”

- Blessed Maria drank from the Heart of Jesus all the goodness and mercy she practiced. I have learned from her how to deal with the difficulties I face and so my relationships in the community and in the apostolate have become more humane.
We have been invited to think about our experience of the challenge of integrating contemplation and action.

My life now is nearing its end. I am not as challenged anymore as younger religious are in this regard. So I want to take a short review of my experiences during the 70 years of my religious life.

When I entered our Congregation Sr. Maria of Divine Heart was already known to me in her struggle to combine an active and contemplative life. She even influenced me to become a sister of the Good Shepherd. As a consecrated person I saw in the vocation to a contemplative and active religious life an invitation which made me very happy and from the very beginning I have tried to be faithful to it.

Yes, and if one appreciates and loves something very much, then one is anxious to accomplish it as well as possible. In all the tasks which were asked of me from the time that I entered until now I’ve tried to support this union of contemplation (inwardness) and action (work) through silence, seclusion and silent endurance of various burdens.

To be allowed to receive and experience God’s love is a mystery. There are many books about this subject. However God goes his own way with each person and only by listening to God in my inner being and also through reading and contemplating Holy Scripture will I continue to learn from Him what His plan is for me.

This should suffice.
Sitting at my desk reading over my criminal law assignment for the next week I look up to see the magnet that my fellow Good Shepherd Volunteer, Sarah, gave to me as part of my Christmas gift during our year of service together last year. It says, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” Joshua 24:15. I was struck suddenly by the grace of God to think over how I am currently balancing contemplation and action after a year of service with the Good Shepherd Volunteers. Contemplation into action is a concept that has often troubled me. I get lost in action and forget that I am doing God’s work and on the opposite hand I can contemplate too much and forget that God wants me to move. Currently in law school, I have found myself at a place in life where I feel a bit at a standstill, but yet, God is working in and through me.

This time last year I was fighting with God who was adamant on sending me to law school. I went to church and for some reason the homily and readings would speak about the law. I met random people at events who were attorneys. Every single time I said to myself that I was not going to apply, God put someone in my life, even if just for a moment, to talk about the path that I should next go on. I tried my very best to ignore it and outright evade it, but God put this path in my heart and in my spirit. He even provided the means through a scholarship that I never saw coming and in my opinion, truly, could only be the product of divine intervention.

It is very difficult to find yourself in law school; especially after coming out of a year where contemplation and action were so vital. I served in New York City as a volunteer and then reflected on it with my community. Combining contemplation and action seemed so simple. Now I live and study with those who don’t necessarily have service or social justice as the guiding factor for their lives and I often find myself fluctuating in between extremes of passiveness and complete devotion to the gifts that God has given me. I am told this is quite normal for law students who in general feel lost and frantic about their life choices so far!

My time with the Good Shepherd Volunteers helped me to learn to set aside time for God. As a student my days are filled with books and lectures and studying, but I have learned to spend each morning taking time to thank God for the day I had before and the day that I am about to have. I do this through a variety of means. When I was a volunteer I was inspired by Saint Mary Euphrasia quotes emailed to me daily. I still use those quotes to start my day now. I also get daily bible readings which I go over each morning. This is in addition to the quotes because without meeting with my community I learned I needed to set aside a separate time to develop my spirituality and I was able to gather those skills from my time with GSV. Some days I am more attentive than others, but I try to find a take away to carry with me as I go out into the world and prepare for class.

I took the LSAT as a senior in college and then planned to travel and do service for a decent chunk of time before heading out to law school. God’s plan was to bring me here after only a year of service and I was not too thrilled with the prospect. However, for the first time in my life
I grew to listen to God’s voice and to trust and follow him. I took time to step back and start contemplating his word. Growing up, God would speak to me and I would happily ignore him. But nothing, NOTHING has been as inspiring as my growing to trust in God’s plan and sitting still for a moment. Law school is not easy, but I bring the Lord with me in all of my activities and it enables me to love what I do. I am having fun in law school, notoriously known for the misery it may cause, because I am carrying God with me.

“As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” My house will serve the Lord even when it takes me to places that I never wanted to be, even when it is difficult. God has placed me in school and provided me with the means to succeed. As one who was prone to action and being out in the field doing service, I have now found myself studying and that being the only thing that I am currently focusing on. This has brought me further into a contemplative part of my life where I am able to pause in the middle of reviewing cases and writing memos, and I can step back and think about how the Lord has placed me here. It is the light when I am lost and uncertain about what I am doing here, but I know that because I take moments in my days and in my weeks to spend with God that I am on the right track and that my actions are aligned with the plan God has laid out for me.
In Saint Mary’s College of California’s Master’s in Leadership program, all learners undergo the process of developing their own definition of leadership. By graduation, I came to understand my leadership as a spiritual practice of connection: connecting to God by fostering my connection to myself, others, and the world around me. Since graduation, I’ve seen that sustaining these connections requires balancing two “apparent opposites” near and dear to Blessed Maria Droste’s heart: contemplation and action.

Of the two, it seems that I’ve always had an easier time with action. This became clear to me when the MA program introduced Action Research Methods (ARM) to utilize for our final Synthesis Projects. ARM involves addressing an inquiry with multiple “cycles” of research, each involving two components: action, to implement a strategy or attempt a particular change, and reflection, to ask critical questions, assess outcomes, and make necessary adaptations for the next cycle. At first, this reflection stuff seemed a little too…California to me. As someone who prided oneself on getting stuff done, I thought that taking time to stop and reflect a little counter-productive? After all, the “R” in ARM didn’t stand for “reflection”, anyway!

Well, I soon discovered that the “R” might as well have stood for reflection, based on how invaluable it was to the research process. With the space and time to re-visit our initial inquiry and the purpose behind the research, my co-researchers and I could effectively assess the impact of our action steps and make adjustments. We took away more and more critical learning during our reflections, and with each cycle, our research became more relevant to all those involved.

As it turns out, the dynamic of action and reflection that brought validity and purpose to my leadership practice also provided a life-giving spiritual foundation: a balance of contemplation and action. Here too, the action came easy to me. But after years of always trying to be on-the-go, it felt uncomfortable to just be with myself – especially with the thoughts, emotions, and other “stuff” that emerged, given the opportunity. It’s been helpful to have support from family, friends, mentors, and therapists, to remind myself that the Divine is there with me, too. So, in “contemplation,” I turn inward to connect to God within. Whether it’s meditation, journaling, prayer, yoga, sitting in nature or enjoying a really good cup of coffee, I try to spend a few minutes at the start and end of each day with some quiet form of self-love. Beautifully, I’ve found that this presence to myself in “contemplation” actually enables me to be more present in “action,” as I turn outward to connect with God through my interactions with others and the world around me.
This is the ideal balance for me and of course it doesn’t always happen. There are days when I get stuck in too much action and all the “stuff” that I didn’t give some time and space to process still comes up, usually mis-directed at someone else. While in these moments I don’t see my best self-shine through, they also bring me back to contemplation. On the other hand, if I feel like I’d like to stay forever in my Zen contemplative space, something always draws me back into action: responsibilities of family, friends, work, or just my stomach growling. Either way, these moments are all blessed by the purpose they serve. I’m grateful to have a spiritual and leadership practice, in that practice requires accepting that my work is imperfect, living, changing, and emergent. And I am humbled to be reminded that my goal isn’t perfection, but learning to respond with more grace, humility, and soul when I mis-step.
The challenge of integrating Contemplation and Action in our mission today is not easy. There are so many challenges in our daily life that if we are not committed to our charism and to following in the footsteps of our foundress, St. Mary Euphrasia, we will not succeed. She was a woman of vision in her time and always sought the will of God in her daily life.

* For Contemplation: I express my love to God and to others through prayer, meditation on the Word of God, source of our life and also by following in the footsteps of Mary, Mother of the Church. I also try to imitate our mother, Mary Euphrasia, who did great things in our Congregation. I strive to practice the love of Christ in my daily life and to respond in faith to the “signs of the times” in our mission today. Prayer is the key to our life of contemplation because Christ always began his mission with prayer and ended it with prayer. It depends on my maintaining my awareness of the presence of Christ and his Mother in my daily life so that I do my best to deepen my intimacy with Christ and with Mary our model IN PRAYER.

Maria Droste is the woman of love and service to the people of God in her time. In carrying out her mission she found difficulties but she was always looking to do the will of God. Her love led her to become the messenger of mercy.

* For action: I draw my power from prayer, meditation on the Word of God to give me strength to commit myself to the will of God and to be aware of the “signs of the time”, to know the needs of others. In action if we are not aware of Christ’s presence in our daily life, the work will draw us away from God like Martha.

The most important thing to integrate contemplation and action is to make the decision to pray or to work and to base this decision on what is the will of God for me now because that will brings us to union with God. That is the difference between contemplation and action. Sometime we struggle in our mission because of a lack of prayer or a lack of confidence in what it is God is calling us to do.
Testimony 24
Sr. Hedwig Jöhl / Switzerland

The integration of contemplation and action is a daily challenge in my mission as a Sister of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd.

The word of God in Holy Scripture always was and is my most reliable companion and teacher on my journey of contemplation and action. A walk in stillness through nature, remaining in silence in a church or the office together in community, all help me to bring my activity into contemplation. In this way I can gradually find rest in God.

When I have the opportunity to participate for a longer period in a bible group “at the table of the Word” I experience that the word of God nourishes me daily and accompanies me in my mission. The group enriches my understanding of the situations and they become alive and effective so that these bible stories accompany me in my work place throughout the week. They nourish me like fresh bread which in the morning carries its fragrance in the air and already delights my heart before it becomes my food. I sense its strength which gives me joy.

Some years ago I read Richard Rohr’s book “Pure Presence”. I felt that it was exactly the right thing at the time. The way into God’s presence came along so light-footedly and attractively. A jump into God’s world seemed so very easy and possible at any time; it needed solely my trust that I would be picked up. But the daily routine caught up with me again and again, concealed the clear view of God like mist in autumn creeping around the hills.

Years later, at the end of my retreat, I discovered that the words “presence” or “silence” and “stillness” appeared almost every day in my notes. The book “Pure Presence” came back to my memory. And I now allow this little visual “dwarf” to “disturb” me often when my thoughts go on the carousel.

And the “burning bush” in Exodus 3 accompanies me time and again and teaches me that contemplation calls into mission – leads into action. Therefore I don’t believe (at least at this point in time) that contemplation alone is lasting without the call into a mission, into action. Even Jesus himself says about his Father that “he is at work all the time“. Contemplation will probably bear its fruits in eternity.

Finally I would like to thank my “teachers” who led me on the way to contemplation, accompanied me and awakened me to our Constitutions which describe the integration of contemplation and action. When I had the privilege of working with our Contemplative Sisters, Constitution 6 was for me the “discovery of the treasure in the field”. There it reads for contemplative sisters: “We witness to the absolute primacy of God”. I know this phrase is written for our Contemplative Sisters. If I read further to Constitution 7, then it leads me as an active sister to “our” way of understanding contemplation when it speaks of the contemplative dimension of our mission.

“Hallowed be your name!”
When I entered Our Lady of Charity in 1961, 55 years ago, the Congregation was presented to me as « semi-contemplative », that is, combining action – the reception of adolescents in difficulty – and contemplation: this did not mean much to me at that time!

A few years later, in the aftermath of Vatican Council II, Our Lady of Charity was affirmed as an “Apostolic Congregation” ... which did not prevent the challenge of combining action and contemplation from remaining very present: I had by then already experienced that it was not so simple, in a very busy apostolic activity.

How did I live it? How do I try to live it still today? I think that the spirituality St. John Eudes left to us is for me the best support: he told us unceasingly that our principle occupation must be to ‘form Jesus in us’, that our life consists in ‘continuing and accomplishing the life of Jesus’, or in ‘letting Jesus continue his life in us’. So, it is always a question of putting Jesus at the centre, of keeping our eyes and heart fixed on Jesus. Jean-Jacques Olier, a friend of John Eudes expressed it as ‘putting Jesus in our eyes, in our heart and in our hands’. So, very poorly, I try to live this in my everyday life, rhythmmed by prayer and divers commitments:

When I pray, I give myself to the Spirit of Jesus so that he might pray in me, for what might come from me is most often very dry, full of distractions; and at the same time, everything that makes my life ‘active’ is present at the time of prayer, clothes my prayer, is also questioned in my daily meditation of the Word of God. The communal liturgy, especially the Eucharist and the celebration of the Office is central for me; it helps me make the link with everything I am living and gives it a sense. In the Eucharist, I take into my heart all my brothers and sisters and the whole world, to ‘pass with Jesus from this world to the Father’; when we pray the Psalms, to present to God through them the cries of the world and its hope...

When I am preparing a talk about our spirituality, I seek to transmit what I have discovered in the Word of God, in the writings and experience of St. John Eudes or others; and I often discover, that when the time comes to present what I have prepared, I say things that are ‘given’ to me at the moment and that I had not written down.

When I meet someone, I also try beforehand to give myself to the Spirit of Jesus, so that he might inspire my words and gestures; in a special way, before going to meet people in prostitution, I place myself before my 4th Vow; I know that by this vow I receive the grace to live these meetings in trust in the presence of the Lord who gives me the words that will be important for them, which will touch them in their life and might be able to make them feel something of the love of the Lord for them; and when I return after these meetings, I ‘depose’ each one of them in the Heart of the Lord I give him our powerlessness to help them as we would like.

Combine contemplation and action, this is a lifelong challenge!
For me, to contemplate is first of all to put myself in God’s presence, in silence. It is to be turned towards Jesus, to read and to listen to his Word, to learn to know him, to welcome his Spirit which teaches us who is the Father, source of all life.

It is thus that I learn each day to welcome love, by letting myself be touched by God for I know that only God can give me love. And it is this welcome which changes my way of seeing so as to see beyond and be able to recognize his presence in everything. I can thus give thanks for existence, for all that exists: creation ... Prayer and meditation teach me to see reality in another way (Heb. 11, 27 – As if he saw the invisible...)

Jesus came into our world so that we might know that God loves us. He came so that fear might cease, so that we would be reconciled, and that our hearts might be opened to love.

It is in knowing that I am loved, that God sends me so that I might give in my turn, and take care of the other as Jesus told us to do (the Good Samaritan, Luke 7). Contemplation leads us directly to action, giving us the peace and joy to share what we have received. And action, in return, calls us to present to God all the persons and situations we meet.

Finally, I would like to talk about Mary at Cana (John 2). She is for me the icon of this integration. Mary is attentive to everything around her. She sees: they have no more wine. She acts by speaking to Jesus. He is not ready, but she trusts him. She does not stop there. She talks to the servants who listen to her. The servants themselves act, fully, totally. And the miracle is produced in abundance.
Testimony 27  
Sr. Maria Jose Moniz / Portugal

All my life I have worked with young people in social difficulties.

My life has always been very active, each day I liked the contemplative dimension. It was always close to the tabernacle that I found the strength to help the young people who arrived, most of them completely disorientated because of their families and also society.

When it was possible I would go to Jesus full of confidence and put the young person into the hands of the Good Shepherd that he might deliver her from her problems and also so that Jesus might help her in her new life. I looked at these young people with tenderness and saw in them the image of Christ who suffers. When the young person accepted the situation I would talk to her about God and her spiritual dimension and often these young people would welcome the message of Jesus the Good Shepherd.
Each day I pray with Psalm 63: Lord, my God, I am seeking you from sunrise. I also like to pray with Psalm 131: I desire nothing else; I want only to remain like a child on its mother’s breast.

In all that I do each day, I remain united to the will of God and of the Congregation. I was on mission in Africa for 20 years in a place that was contrary to the Word of God. In each mission I sought to live united to God and to help my brothers, as did the little shepherd of Fatima, saying as the Virgin Mary taught: Oh Jesus, it is for your love and also for the conversion of sinners". 
With the celebration of my Golden Jubilee of Religious Life, on 20th October 2016, I shared the experience of what I am actually living at this moment.

It is for me a time of thanksgiving to the Lord, lived out in faithfulness, in peace and joy. It is a looking back over the history lived out and the discovery that it is full of tenderness, mercy and many graces from the all-powerful Lord.

My joy and my gratitude are great at being able to celebrate it in faithfulness, in love and with many Sisters of the Congregation who lived with me.

Also I felt great gratitude for my parents, my family and for the christian atmosphere in which I grew up and which taught me to contemplate God in respecting people with an attention to the poorest. There was much struggle, but in contemplating our God, I had the strength to get over the difficulties, in giving joy and peace to those who were close to me.

This event expressed well the confirmation of my gratitude to God and the challenge to continue with a renewed love and total generosity.
I entered the Congregation when our lifestyle was still called “mixed”, i.e. a style of life which was both monastic and apostolic. We owe the title: “Congregation of apostolic life”, to the Vatican Council II (1962-64). Having been rewritten, our Constitutions, n°7, reminds us of the need for contemplation so as to be efficient in action. This was my initial formation and it has followed throughout my religious life!

Union with God is for me the “sine qua non” for efficiency in my mission. I always need a certain self-control in order to resist the temptation to prefer action before consecrating myself to God for the exclusive meeting with Him. Often the urgency of the call of our brothers and sisters is so imperious that we have to “leave God for God”. Failures in action have posed serious question to me. But, in fact, it is in the contemplation of God that I hear the voices of those who call to me: the cries which seek a human face to listen to them.

Yes, in fidelity to contemplation, I discover that god is always present where I am, be it in the field of action, be it in the chapel. Activism does not answer the expectations of the people I meet. Days of recollection, or of retreat, have always helped me to put order back into my life. I begin a day by invoking the Holy Spirit to accompany me, to enlighten me, to direct my actions. From now on, it is a question of a daily habit to invoke him not only at the beginning of the day but several times during the day according to the light I need for my activity. Mary teaches me to listen.

I find the response to this challenge of integrating contemplation and action in letting God take the direction of my life. The scene where the Lord goes to a place of solitude to pray speaks to me strongly. “What does the Lord say to His Father?” In silence, I imagine that he listened to the Father and reaffirmed, he returned to the crowds and worked his miracles: He taught, accomplished cures, miracles. It is in this contemplation, in this “silence”, that light comes to me for my action; light on aspects that up until then, were not very clear. It is His Spirit which surges, which gives me light on a plan of action, on a situation that seems difficult. Yes, it is in silence that I find the response.

The bigger the field, the more I understand that I need spaces of silence. Then, I am able to establish a positive, fruitful relationship; I am more available to listen, I will know the right words to use, expected by whoever is suffering; by whoever is crushed in his/her dignity; by those who feel depressed. He acts in my place, I know; I am convinced of it. Some responses and behaviours confirm that people have met the Lord without knowing it.

My guides: the Word of God, John Eudes and Mary Euphrasia! They are living models for me: who could doubt their incessant, unfailing, innovating action? Their lives were nourished by God. They lived united to Him. So, me too, in the activities that absorb much time, my heart is turned towards Him. His loving presence is from now on tangible and it is that which I share with people thirsty for Him, often without knowing it.
St. Teresa of Avila has much inspired me to face the challenge of daily life. I like to re-read her. She has always inspired me in the quest for God with her constancy and faithfulness to prayer despite great difficulties. She led such an active and dynamic life outside of the normal, yet she became “master” of the mystical. John Eudes, disciple of Berulle (passionate about the spirit of Carmel) and Mary Euphrasia (admirer of the great saint of Avila), did they not communicate to us, perhaps something of this aspect of tenacity in the seeking for God so as to accomplish their mission?
I entered the Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd in 1963. Why this choice? I knew at that time that the congregation was “semi-contemplative” and, before my entry, I had made a retreat with the Visitation in Nancy. The prioress who saw me living in the midst of her community said to me “You need to find an order that links contemplation and action”.

At the beginning of my religious life, I found the mission with the adolescents very difficult and I needed to count on the strength of an Other to continue. I went regularly to the chapel, at other times than the times of community prayer. I begged God to come to my help. I contemplated the Cross and I thought: if He gave His life for me in this way, it is normal that in my turn I participate in His suffering “for the salvation of souls”. Little by little from the experiences lived out, I realized that despite the help brought by the sisters, the friendships created, one Only could fill my life and be my comfort at all times because He was always there. He did not have an obedience that could distance Him from me… I continued to call on Him to help me. But when the difficulty had passed, I gave thanks, for then I became aware that my faith had been strengthened by it.

I spent many years with adolescents in difficulty, place in Institutions, then with women victims of violence, welcomed “with us” with their children. I worked first of all as a teacher and then as directress in our educational centres and the reception centres. Then I was named responsible for the formation of the young professed sisters while continuing the mission in the Institution. I insisted a lot with each of them on the necessity of an indispensable and daily heart to heart with Jesus so as to “keep going”. The responsibilities I had increased and it was sometimes difficult for me to stop so as to find the Lord more intimately. I had the habit of getting up early in the morning to pray before beginning my working day. It happened that I missed meetings with Him, claiming that the work was too pressing and urgent but I understood that I was much more peaceful and more “efficient” in the accomplishment of my tasks when I had responded to His call!

My meeting with the Lord was not limited to “formal” prayers to which we are held to by our religious commitment, it became Presence. I deepened our spirituality which is “to form Jesus in us”. During the day, I gave thanks: I said to Him thank you for always being there at the heart of my heart; thank you for what I discovered to be good and beautiful, for all that He gave me, and it included my weakness for I experienced that He was “digging down in me poverty so as to teach me to pray”. I confided to him my sufferings those of my brothers and sisters. I interceded for and I offered the people I met during my travels, in the transports or my meetings. I do not blame myself if I miss a meeting but I suffer from knowing that He is there, that He is waiting for me and that I have forgotten Him! It is now an “old friendship” between us of which I would not know how to let go. I talk to Him of all that touches me; I lend my ear to listen to him where I
am when I manage to silence myself interiorly... Prayer is sometimes easy but it is also a combat. I try to keep at it.

I could not envisage my mission without being in link with The One who confides it to me.

Dare I say that contemplation and action are like my two lungs?
At the beginning of my religious life, for me work was work, prayer was prayer, but with time, I realized that it was for me, the voice of the Lord within me that was my way in contemplation and action. I realised his presence and allowed myself to be guided by him in my life, through my contemplation I lived the action. I strongly sense that I live this contemplation in action because I have left myself entirely in the hands of Jesus to use me to serve him.

I cannot separate the two dimensions, action and contemplation, it is through my work that I pray, and I carry the mission in my prayers.

I see in the story of Martha and Mary, the reality of our human condition.

Prayer is the foundation and the source which helps me in my apostolate.

Prayer is the essence itself of my life and it is this which gives vitality to my apostolic life.

I also sense the continual presence of the Lord with me and not only during prayer.

The life of a religious without prayer is like a plant without water, thus it is prayer that helps me to grow in my life.

Jesus is present to me all day and I tell him that I too, I am present to him and I take my strength from Him. Prayer in my life outweighs my ministry and it helps me to live out my ministry and I try to turn my ministry into a prayer.

We experience challenges of integrating contemplation and action as a struggle which pushes us more and more to have an open spirit and to be creative in our mission.

In constantly adoring the Blessed Sacrament putting the needs of the population and the intentions of our mission before the Lord, we understand how to be present among the people.

Contemplation pushes me to live in union with Jesus throughout the day; it helps me imitate Jesus ex: to go towards the other, to live out reconciliation which is at the heart of our charism, to live out mercy also.

Contemplation helps me to experience a balance between what I say and what I do.

The feeling of the presence of God in my life helps me to do everything with joy even if this work is simple.

There is a challenge in letting oneself be attracted by the mission but we have to be aware of the importance of nourishing our souls by days of recollection or taking the time to go far from our work frontiers so as to rest with Jesus and to be nourished.
Prayer helps us to cope with the problems of each day and to put them before the Lord.

We cannot be at prayer all day, but in full action we can feel ourselves under God’s eye.

I sense the presence of God in my life sometimes by simple gestures (a kind look, a smile, a caress…) which reveal that the Lord is indeed present among us.

**A community of elderly sisters / Province of Egypt-Sudan**

Our mission is our prayer; we do not have a specific mission but poor health serves as a mission (suffering); the Blessed Sacrament and prayer are a source of union with God.

The Holy Spirit helps us every day to live out the ministry.

We are rather a contemplative community. Among 8 sisters, 5 of us do not have any direct apostolic work, but we see it as our responsibility to pray for all our sisters who are in the active apostolate for all the great needs of our Middle East milieu... (Migrants, poor, sick etc...)
We reflected in community on how we live out this challenge of integrating Contemplation and Action.

I place in the loving Hearts of Jesus and Mary each of the persons towards whom I am sent. I am aware that only Jesus, the Good Shepherd can guide me, inspire me to bring these young mothers back to Him. In Contemplation, I draw the strength and the energy necessary which give me: courage, dynamism so as to “bounce back”. When tiredness comes, saps my energy, in order to continue to go forward, I need to find myself before the Lord and it is in Contemplation that I get back my strength.

For me it is primordial that the action draws its Source in Contemplation. However, what is most difficult for me is to be able to harmonize (because of my professional activity) these two times: Action – Contemplation. How can I remain in this Heart to Heart with Jesus, beyond the hazards of life. It is true that often, action takes more place than Contemplation. At this time it is important for me to stop, reflect and find a true balance between my daily activities and the time of meeting with My Lord. To do this, I nourish my interior life with reading: the Word of God, the documents of the Church, the biographies of Saints (notably of our Congregation) are my principle sources.
I have a thread running through my day that animates me, for example: fill us with your love in the morning, and our days will be filled with joy”. I bear witness in sowing joy wherever I go. If it is not joy, I do good actions: it is a witness of love that I give.

“Hold fast” with Christ. In my meetings with people, when I am listening, I think of this and I ask Jesus to be present during the course of this relationship for what the person is telling me at that moment is important for her, may I not minimize in any way her sharing. In this way, I pay attention to the person in the group. Hold fast also in the little or large concerns of the community life: it is a struggle. Sometimes I manage to get over my pride, at other times not. Despite this I come back to the word: Hold fast, this does not discourage me but I advance and make efforts to consider my sisters. Hold fast too in the organization of activity with the parishioners (animating the young people and a day’s walk the parents require attention to little details. What helps me a lot is the question why I do this or that and for whom? Although the results disappoint me sometimes, I go forward, it is for the Lord. He is there. When I leave the house, I invite Jesus to come with me, when I come back, I thank Him for what has been experienced. This is the way my day unfolds. I see that integrating Contemplation in my life, has good repercussion on my Actions and my behaviour.
Experience 1: Integrating contemplation and action allows me to return to myself and pray for all that I am currently doing, otherwise, all that would only be superficial. I often ask myself this question: what is it that Jesus the Good Shepherd is saying to me in what I am doing? Is it for my own accomplishment or rather to let Jesus be in everything in what I do and live. Let Jesus act through my actions and gestures so as to live the vow of zeal.

Experience 2: There are so many events each day; this leads me to have a daily connection with Christ in order to reread events and do his will. Indeed, how can I translate the mission of Christ into action if I do not remain connected to him? May He help us to be these contemplatives in action and do His will throughout our day!

Experience 3: Integrating contemplation and action for me, lies in the fact of often remembering during the day the Word of God which the Holy Church has addressed to us for the day so as to see how to put it into practice in what I am doing. It is also, seeing in each person I meet in my day, Christ himself who lives in this person.

Experience 4: We, novices of the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd of West Africa, have discovered the challenge of combining contemplation and action. Before, we were thinking that life in the novitiate was made up more of prayer than activities. Reality shows that contemplation and action remain inseparable. According to our experiences, we see that contemplation pushes us to action. It is thus that our resolutions made in our meditations on the Word of God become concrete actions in daily life.

For example: after meditating on Matthew 25, 35-36, we put more emphasis on welcoming our neighbor, in maintaining creation (watering the garden, filling the water filter, feeding the community, the poor and strangers...)

According to the experience of one of us, one day in the mission she stayed with a woman in difficulty and an ex-prisoner to teach them how to make bleach, while the others were doing a sharing of the Gospel. While in the mission that day, she remained in communion with the others in prayer.

Another, in the apostolate with women in difficulty and in prostitution; at the time of community prayer, she offered each of the women encountered to the Lord so as to share their sufferings and difficulties.

After having meditated on the disciples of Emmaus, in order to mark the continual presence of Christ, the Officiant of the day invited all the community to participate actively in the feast at the
prison so as to be a presence of the Risen Christ in the midst of these people in distress. At the end of this day our prayer invited us to a commitment with the prisoners.

Before undertaking all activity, we put ourselves in the presence of God and we allow ourselves to be guided by his Holy Spirit. For example, the classes, the manual work, the community meetings and the different missions.

In conclusion, we can say that contemplation and action are different, one from the other, but that it is possible to combine them together, the two go hand in hand because the fruits of contemplation have to be seen in concrete action, and the action also leads us to contemplation.

“Faith is dead without works” (James 2, 17)
Testimony 36  
Sr. Marie Claire Puthiath / India

“LOVE NEVER SAYS, IT IS ENOUGH.” - St. Mary Euphrasia

On 8th June 1977, I left joyfully to taste the unknown as a missionary, in a far distant country: Mauritius.

When I arrived on 8th June, I confided my whole mission to “Blessed Maria Droste”. I had a novena from her, for the devotion to the Sacred Heart. I prayed it every day, it strengthened me. I made my Final Vows in Mauritius, it was a wonderful day, and I offered my life to the Lord. My greatest desire had been realized and I chanted the Magnificat with the Virgin Mary, our Mother, and the Mother of all men.

The Bishop of Mauritius, Monsignor Margeot, planned to build a nursery in a poor neighbourhood. Before the plans were realised, he asked me to go and visit the families so as to determine which children were in the greatest need. Despite the fact that I did not understand creole, the people welcomed me with open arms. In complete confidence they confided their worries, their sufferings, their fears and their wishes to me. They were very honoured that a sister would visit them because it was a difficult neighbourhood with drugs, alcohol, prostitution, theft etc.

As I could not speak creole, I listened to them, consoled them and comforted them as I could with the help of God. They said to me: “you talk to us with the language of the heart that is enough for us”.

Before going to visit these families, in my prayer I asked the Lord to be with me, to help me to discern by giving me his regard of tenderness and love. After each visit I marvelled to see that in meeting other people I was enriched and my heart grew larger.

This phrase of Jesus followed me “Do not be afraid, my grace is sufficient for you.” This gave me a little more strength, it made me grow in the love of God.

After the visits, I chose the children who most needed help, for example a child whose parents “nourished him on wine”!

We prepared as a team how to receive the children: some prepared the cots, others cleaned, tidied etc.

Thanks to all these efforts, the neighbourhood was transformed; a sense of solidarity was established between the people.

This nursery bore the name “Bethlehem Nursery” and it became the pilot nursery for the whole country of Mauritius. We can therefore say: “Nothing is impossible to God.”

In Mauritius I also visited the women in the prison of Beau-Bassin for their rehabilitation. I gave catechism to the adults for the preparation of marriages, or for first communion and I visited the families who were in need, before leaving for Madagascar to work with the women in distress.
Finally, on the island of Reunion, I had many other missions.

For all that I experienced, I needed a lot of perseverance, endurance and love. Thanks to the intercession of Maria Droste, I would always take refuge in the Sacred Heart of Jesus, especially in the Eucharist for he said to us “Come to me all you who are burdened and I will give you rest”.

Up until today, I have never stopped invoking the precious help of Blessed Maria Droste. I hope she will be canonised for the glory of God and that the Sacred Heart of Jesus will give us this grace for our congregation.
Blessed Maria Droste Project

Testimony 37
Sr. Madeleine Guigue / France

Around the age of twelve, I began to aspire to a love that would not be limited as human love is limited. God, within me, opened my eyes to a Love that is endless; his Love, and I understood little by little that I could have it!

A little later, while I was thinking of becoming a doctor, a diocesan missionary talked to me about a congregation that “healed souls”. Something happened within me which was transformed into a deep call to follow the Eternal God who healed and saved by his Love!

I was twenty years old and I grasped all the signs of encouragement that he gave me in order to respond to his call. During my first years of religious life, I felt torn between action at the service of the young girls and prayer. I see better today, that the desire I had, to deepen my faith by times of formation, retreat, came from the Holy Spirit. It is what gave me the assurance to keep confidence in Him alone. I also see, that what inhabited me and held me was the struggle of hope, hope in each person confided to me, in each sister, in myself. “I sense that she hopes in me!” said a young girl.

Around thirty years of age, in the French context of May 68 with its calling into question of religious and moral values, I was tried by a quite rapid change of community. I experienced a time of interior distress and vulnerability. I experienced then, at the level of my faith and my flesh, a deep sharing in the suffering of the young girls. I felt myself become their sister, saved, and healed myself by the Good Shepherd in the midst of them! This moment represented a paschal passage, in my apostolic life and a deep attachment to Jesus the Good Shepherd and to my congregation.

This is why, some years later, the companionship with the Lord gave me confidence and freedom. While I was longing to rest a little after two terms of three months each with the young girls, my local leader asked me to go and lead the holiday camp. Distraught, I turned to the Lord and said to him that I could see only one solution: to go to the camp with him but as a “honeymoon”! The Lord was very close to me and allowed me to experience a very relaxing leisure time with the young girls who, for a long time, remembered it as marvellous!

Around the age of 40, an experience marked a turning in my spiritual and apostolic life. I had just experienced the sudden death of one of my brothers, and I came up against incessant difficulties with the young girls. I discerned with my local leader, that a break of 3 months from the charge of the young girls would help me. After a little rest, I followed the exercises of St. Ignatius for a month. There, I had confirmation of God’s call to me, a strong call to believe in his Love alone. I felt completely renewed interiorly, in order to go back to the girls and to put myself totally in His hands.

Then, came a time of leadership. It was the “yes” of Mary to the Spirit that helped me to accept and live the charge in joy. Today at 77 years, I try to be open to his eternal Love!
What a grace is our vocation!

Yes, I never cease to give thanks to the Lord for having called me to follow Him in Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, for what seems to me equilibrium of life, a harmony between prayer and active life. Very early, a religious who knew my vocation taught me to “make prayer” as we used to say and I am very grateful to her for having taught me to persevere in prayer.

It seems to me that the presence of a contemplative lifestyle in our congregation is a strong symbol of this intricacy of prayer-action, and I often say to our contemplative sisters how their life of prayer helps us to “keep going”

At the beginning of my religious life, I suffered from not being able as much as I wished to transmit the joy of the faith to the people we welcomed, to keep quiet about The One who is the joy of my life, for reasons linked to the “French culture”. Happily those times are now far off!

At the Spirituality Centre I also had the grace to become familiar with the writings of John Eudes, Mary Euphrasia’s letters and the life of Maria Droste. At the same time I was involved in helping women and vulnerable young people. This continual coming and going was a privilege that was shown in the life of Jesus and Mary “who kept all these things in her heart”. Living this led me to try to link the Spirituality Centre and Justice and Peace, so that prayer might be translated into acts of justice, and that justice would flow from the life of prayer.

I believe more and more deeply in the strength and efficiency of the prayer of ALL: there are evils on our earth that only the grace of God can eradicate! I think about the exploitation of human beings by others: who other than our God can get to the end of this evil that touches millions of people on our planet? And He is waiting for our concrete commitment and our solidarity, up to our last breath!

So, to live in Him, each moment, whatever is happening: “it is no longer I that live” and to be, with all my human brothers and sisters, in the hand of the Father, from which no one will snatch them.
I was born in 1934 in a profoundly Christian family and very committed to Catholic Action.

I felt very early on that I would be a religious, when – for my confirmation and my communion – I renewed, with these words, my baptismal promises:
“I attach myself to Jesus Christ for ever through the hands of Mary.”

I drew my faith from the example of my parents: a father of exceptional charity and a mother both courageous and loving. I owe them my vocation.

I am not an intellectual, but this word of the Lord to St. Paul has always sustained me: “My grace is sufficient for thee.” (2Cor.12, 9)

When I was twenty years old I entered in Angers the Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd. In the novitiate, I asked to belong to a community of contemplative sisters, for these religious of the congregation, I knew, consecrated their life to prayer, to silence and to solitude to support the apostolic sisters in their mission to the young people for whom they had received the charge. I was refused. But, you have to believe that God had his plan for me, for this desire was always within me during the forty-three years that I tried to give all to God, as a missionary, in countries as diverse as Algeria, Reunion, Madagascar and Sudan. I notably shared there the joys and the sufferings of the women who were confided to us: women in prison, single mothers etc.

In 2006, I presented my request to join the contemplative sisters. On 19th December 2010, I was definitively integrated into the community of Saint-Yrieix, and a few years later I came to the community of Garenne in Angers.

After forty-three years of mission, this stage was for me a second call to follow Jesus and a deep source of thanksgiving to the Good Shepherd who guides me always. I came, in this spirit of gratitude, to celebrate my diamond jubilee on 31st May 2017!

And interiorly the Lord says to me:
“Now, come in silence and in solitude. Intercede by prayer, for all those met in your missionary life. Present them to God and plunge them in Him!”

Thus, my sacrifice is integrated into His for the salvation of souls.

Hidden in the contemplative life, my life receives – from His sacrifice and His prayer – its apostolic fruitfulness for the Church.
Testimony 40
Sr. Andrea Tillmanns /Germany

Around 2 a.m. in the morning, I return to the community. 3 hours of “working on the street” are behind me. The house is calm, everyone is asleep.

This evening, I met perhaps 50 to 60 women prostitutes in Brussels. Their stories, their worries, their fears are circulating in my head: Stories of women who sell their bodies in order to feed their children, Women who are not able to defend themselves against the violence of a client because they are in an illegal administrative situation and they cannot go to the commissariat of police. Women who sleep with men without protection, because they have been waiting so long in the street without making any money and the client will only pay for sex without a condom., women who are afraid of their pimp because they have not yet made enough money. Women who have been outside in the cold for most of the day and can no longer speak because their lips are frozen, very young women who are rather children, and who have already experienced unbearable things.

All these images inundate me with feelings like anger, bereavement and despair which upset my equilibrium. We want to set off at a run ... “to save these women”, to organize help, to write protest letters ...

But the night slows me down... the calm of the house protects me against my juvenile super activity.

My way leads me to the chapel, almost unconsciously. “The eternal Light” welcomes me. Through the window, I see only sombre silhouettes of the trees in the garden. I open the tabernacle ... I glimpse the “Blessed Sacrament” more than I can see it truly. I sit down and close my eyes.

“Not my will but thine be done.” (Luke 22:42) “Everything comes from the Father” (John 7, 16-18)

I am a sister in temporary vows... I love our charism, especially our ministry with women in prostitution. And sometimes I have to slow down... or someone has to slow me down...

To be a religious means to love God. We give a spiritual depth to our life, a solid base a universal sense. These are the roots of our commitment of all our commitments. They are directed towards prayer... “Through HIM, with HIM and in HIM ...” Only this interaction between God and me offers me the strength to be able to truly live my vocation. My vocation would be empty without a relationship with God, without a life of prayer.”

“Slow me down” means the need to find the balance between “action and contemplation”. We have to integrate these two elements harmoniously in a religious life; they are inseparable. “Slow me down” ... so as to become calm, to give ear to the silence ... to listen to God, to feel God ...
In this night, before the tabernacle, eyes closed, I see Jesus: Jesus who walked, who met men and women. He listened to people. He encouraged. He believed in people. He helped them. He loved them ...

Jesus concluded a covenant with men. We are associated with his work of salvation. We continue his mission on earth. (John Eudes, O.C. I, op. cit. p. 161-166)

My work in the street ... this is the same dynamic ... follow the model of the Good Shepherd; continue his mission, here and today. Give a face to the love of God, in a world often without love.

The house is still asleep. I close the tabernacle and go to bed. I fall asleep straightaway. Stories of women are still present in my head, but He is with them, also with me. Tomorrow, with HIM, the mission will continue.
In my experience of 50 years of consecrated life, I can acknowledge with great gratitude to God that I have tried to integrate these two dimensions in my life.

In the first place, I have always wanted to offer the Lord the best of my day, making sure that the encounter with Him is the first activity of the day.

How comforting it has been for me, to start the day of work by offering to God in advance, what the day would bring!

The Eucharist, with the message of the Word of God, is another great help in my apostolic life. The moments of the Liturgy of the Hours, coupled with the moments of Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, the monthly retreats and the annual retreat have been and remain in my life moments of contemplation that enrich me. My prayer tries to incarnate the needs of our world, the Church, the Congregation, along with the needs of those we serve, our families and friends.

In the midst of my work, I feel the presence of the Lord in the encounter with the brother who suffers, in the marginalized women, in the jailed, in the act of listening, the welcome, the dialogue with so many wounded people, trying to give them strength, and encouragement so that they rise from the mud where they are submerged.

I am convinced that my life would not make sense if I did not live these two dimensions; our charism is to help heal wounded hearts. Our vocation is a great challenge. Without God we could do nothing.

In my experience of accompanying a community of homosexuals I became aware that this is the work of grace.

In my service to prisoners, it is the same. They all have a hunger for God, and a need to experience God’s merciful love.

In Senegal, living in a Muslim environment, I discovered the God of Islam, Allah, whom we Christians also worship.

Blessed Maria Droste lived fully this integration and it was the secret of her apostolic fruitfulness. Her life was deeply rooted in the Heart of Christ and from there she was drawing strength, light, compassion and tenderness that is to say as a religious of the Good Shepherd "her zeal embraced the whole world."
In sharing this simple experience, I want to make it very clear that I am far from being a contemplative person. I try to live in my life an experience of a God full of love, tenderness and mercy, especially in the figure of Jesus Good Shepherd. I remember reading in Genesis the words of Jacob, spoken at the moment of his death, that have become a motto for me, "The Lord has been my Shepherd since I was born." I often contemplate Jesus the Good Shepherd who has me in His arms and shows me his ways.

I also like to contemplate the presence of God in creation, in his greatness and his power. I am drawn to how he has created everything for our good. We are a privileged object of his creation.

But above all I look constantly at Jesus in his mysteries, at the moment of his Incarnation in the womb of the Blessed Virgin: in his humility, and in his desire to fulfill the will of the Father. The mystery of the Incarnation is outside of all human reason and I can only stand in awe and worship.

Contemplating the moment of the birth of Jesus stirs and shapes my life. I see the Son of God becoming a weak child, in need of everything. These stages of Jesus’ life impel me to continue working in humility, simplicity and poverty. The same thing happens to me when I contemplate Our Lord in his passion and his suffering, seeing him experience humiliation and pain for our sake. I thank our Lord who has done so much for us and I thank him for the gift of faith.

The Resurrection of Jesus is another of his mysteries that, when contemplating it, my heart is filled with joy and hope. Jesus is alive and is a wonderful presence in our lives and his luminous signs are in us and in the history of the world and the Church.

I also contemplate Jesus in the Gospel, healing the sick, forgiving sinners, comforting women, caressing children, caring at all times for the poor, and those who suffer. In this process I sense Jesus is alive continuing these same actions on earth today. I am challenged when I contemplate these passages, to help even in a very small way, those who suffer and to be at the service of the needy with everything I am and with what I have.

In my contemplation I am also affected by the gaze of Jesus. He looked upon the poor, sinners, women, etc. And I think it was a look from his heart; a look that transformed. His eyes were filled with tenderness, love, compassion and mercy. I wonder how my look affects others, including those I do not accept. Contemplating the gaze of Jesus helps me to correct my attitudes.

I also occasionally discover the presence of God and his plan of salvation in the liberating events present in the history of people. In the intuitions of leaders I see the palpable presence of the
Spirit of God, transforming concrete situations of injustice and oppression, and in experiences of freedom, justice and respect for human rights.

Likewise in the history of the Church, I contemplate the presence of the Spirit in the intuitions of change that are occurring. In spite of so many errors, the Kingdom of God continues to be built through the holiness of so many men and women. I see the witness of many martyrs, who, in the surrender of their lives show that the following of Jesus is possible in all places and stages of history.
Testimony 43
Sr. Margarita Rodríguez Olguín / Mexico

This experience I have every day of my life beginning at dawn, when I sign my forehead in the name of the Father of the Son and the Holy Spirit. I live these two realities in my life when, fueled by the word of God, I seek to do the will of God by means of serving my neediest sisters. My daily prayer becomes an incarnate prayer when I have before me the concrete faces of the women I meet in the market, in the commercial center, in the same parish, or in the neighborhood where I live. I remember their situations of pain. All this I take to community prayer. With my sisters, I offer to God, the God who sees everything and who gives comfort to those who lack love and compassion. Our intentions include women, children and young people who so easily lose their way in life, elderly adults who are seen as a hindrance to the family and neglected, a woman dominated by her husband who does not give her what she needs, and young people who lack values and who are sometimes an easy prey to organized crime. All of them in one form or another are a part of my action of contemplation and my incarnate prayer.

What feeds my contemplative life is the offering of each of my thoughts, words and works for the above-mentioned cases. Even though I am contemplative, I am often tempted to devote more time to one thing or another. It is then that my consecration comes again to my mind and heart, which is: it is in and through my prayer that I participate and promote the peace and well-being of the people entrusted to me. In prayer, I accompany them in this moment of their life. Through prayer and action I try to live the phrase of St. Mary Euphrasia, "A person is worth more than a world".
When speaking about contemplation and action, in the life of Blessed Maria Droste, there are two profound attitudes that combine in the life of this extraordinary woman, whose experience led her to transcend difficult situations. This was the cross that the Divine Shepherd allowed her to live in her short and intense life.

Her contemplative attitude made her a woman full of God, in love with the Heart of Jesus, source of her strength. With a heart of a good shepherd, she was readily moved by the fate of the girls and women most in need of her time. She risked everything, so that they could recover their dignity and experience the mercy and tenderness of the Lord. The Kingdom of God and her sense of justice moved her to ask Pope Leo XIII for the Consecration of the world to the Heart of Jesus.

Action and contemplation in her life allowed her to become an attentive shepherdess, available for mission. She was very human and open to the needs of the sisters in her community and to the people who sought her to share their experiences and sufferings, and to receive light and words of comfort.

In my personal life these two dimensions have been inseparable. In my 48 years as a consecrated religious of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd in this Province of Central America, my life has been filled with an abundance of experiences tinted with light and shadows. I recognize that in contemplation I have always found the answer to live, serve, to suffer, to forgive, to sacrifice, and to give the best of myself in the mission. I have learned to understand the movement of God in my life and to keep in mind that in action, I was leaving an imprint that came from the Mercy of God.

God has become visible so many times in the reality that I live, in my prayer, in the hand that is offered, in the shared gift and in the continuous encounter with the poorest people that I encounter in my day.

Action and contemplation in my life, in the light of Blessed Maria Droste, have been a school of spirituality. For me, these two dimensions are integrated in the vow of zeal, of the Eudist heritage. That flame of love that Blessed Maria discovered in the Heart of Jesus the Good Shepherd and in the heart of Mary Euphrasia and John Eudes was one and the same. In that love she lived the mission and served those who in their pain cried for justice, inclusion and solidarity.

This has been a light in my path, to live my consecration with fidelity and at the same time, it us a motivation to look for relevant ways of living today with renewed enthusiasm, this vocation, at the service of the neediest of people.
A HAPPY EXPERIENCE

Blessed Maria Droste is an example that encourages and strengthens my faith.

In my consecrated life, I have experienced the need to integrate contemplation and action in daily life, in my community, in the apostolate, in moments of joy and also when difficulties arise. It is in the experience of these moments of prayer, of intimate union with Jesus, where I have found the strength to serve with love in the mission and to proclaim the Gospel with joy.

The loving presence of Jesus the Good Shepherd has always been with me, filling me with peace, love and strength, especially when I face personal weakness, illness or sacrifice.

The Lord has never abandoned me! Every day I strive to remain attentive to his inspiration and this helps me to accept the will of God with peace, even if it is difficult for me.

By integrating prayer and life activities, my happiness increases and I feel the need to communicate it to other people, especially my sisters, the children I evangelize, and those who are near or far in the whole of humanity who await my testimony of Merciful love.

For this reason today and always I will exclaim:

THANK YOU LORD FOR YOUR LOVE AND MERCY!
ACROSTIC TO MARIA DROSTE

M — Contemplative woman in daily action
A — You connected zeal with fervent prayer
R — Radiating flashes of purity of intention
I — Integrating yourself faithfully to mission
A — Ardent missionary and zealous shepherdess

D — From your bed of pain, as a follower of Euphrasia
R — Quick and fast your prayer arrives
O — Avoiding stumbling blocks like a bright star
S — Hail merciful and faithful bearer!
T — You had to dig in the desert to find the good
E — Your example we need to imitate today in order to be able to walk with the Church

This acrostic to MARIA DROSTE was originally written in Spanish. Here we offer you a translation in English which is not necessarily an acrostic.
I have always admired the life of our Sister Maria Droste. She is so full of love and mercy and I am happy and feel called to imitate her and make her life known. I have integrated Maria Droste into my spiritual life as a result of a moment that marked forever my life of contemplation and action.

In 1981, when I was in charge of a home in Central America for incarcerated women, one of the women hit my left eye and this resulted in the loss of my eye. I could not continue with this apostolate. Two years later, I returned to the same institution, to work with adolescents. There I discovered that God loved me very much and asked me to abandon myself entirely into his hands. God gave me three gifts: love, forgiveness and mercy which I was to distribute among the people who suffer the most. As I serve in the various missions in the Province I always unite my prayer to daily action. I am sure to find in prayer the support and strength I need, so that my actions may be effective and bear fruit for the Kingdom.

I am currently working in Costa Rica, in the evangelization of children, who are at social risk. I am very happy living this mission. I continue my life of dedication for the Kingdom with great enthusiasm filled with joy and peace.

I AM GRATEFUL AND PRAISE MY FRIEND, KING AND LORD, FOR HIS LOVE AND HIS MERCY TO ME! MAY ALL BE FOR HIS GLORY AND THE GOOD OF OTHERS!
Testimony 48
Sr. Marina Ureña / Costa Rica

For me, this has been an immense gift from Jesus. His love has always sustained me and filled my life with joy, despite my weaknesses. The Good Shepherd, with the humble contribution of my prayer, has been associating me in a dialogue of divine intimacy that I like to define as CONTEMPLATION.

A day in my young life, I discovered in my heart, an insatiable desire to consecrate my love and my whole life to the Lord. In my village, visits were made by some Sisters who were involved in different apostolic services. I felt great admiration and esteem for them. While working as a social worker in an office in the Capital, I had the joy of knowing about the missionary service carried out by the Good Shepherd Sisters. They served many battered and suffering women in the Women’s Correctional Center.

These experiences led to a longed-for discovery: I WOULD BE A RELIGIOUS LIKE THEM AND WITH THEM! I lived a period of prayerful search, formation, study and small services - this was my novitiate. And one day, I was allowed to consecrate myself to Him, and to serve Him, alongside my beloved Sisters. My life of prayer would also be to serve Jesus, attending to students, inmates, mothers and girls in need of love and Christian formation.

I discovered with joy that a part of my religious family were contemplative Sisters! By means of their prayer the Sisters were present to the young people and those who suffer, especially those we served in our apostolates. I always felt supported by their prayer. I depended on their prayer since my time was filled with the urgencies and needs of others, and my time for contemplative prayer was limited. Both lifestyles are inspired by the same and unique LOVE that allows one to “give one’s life for the sheep”, that populate the earth.

Since then I have been able to confirm, for myself, the integration of a life of prayer and love for Jesus Christ the Good Shepherd, and to serve Him, with love, in the people who suffer most.

To contemplate is to pray. Prayer is to speak with Him and to listen with love and desire that all human beings come to know Him, love Him, and live happily in Him.
"YOU DID IT TO ME."

"No person who meets you will depart without being in some way comforted, relieved or sanctified, or receiving any grace, not even the most hardened sinner ..." These are the words that Mary Droste heard from Jesus and which she realized and identified with and through her union with his compassionate and merciful Heart. The itinerary of her life culminated with a long illness and with the Consecration of the whole world to the Heart of Christ. In her contemplation she discovered a deep association --dying in order to have new life and thus was able to live with the disease with peace and endure many sufferings.

The intensity of her love for God was such an intimate and personal experience that one can follow the path of her progressive transformation, in her responses to the Divine, and in an astonishing reciprocity. "I began to understand that without a spirit of sacrifice, the love of the Heart of Jesus is only an illusion."

Through the years I have been able to understand that only deep contact with the Mystery of God allows me to deepen my sense of human weakness and acquire a greater understanding of people, to be moved by compassion and mercy, once I have myself experienced them. This is the most fruitful link between contemplation and action. Contemplation that engraves in my soul the words of Jesus: "You did it to me." and then sends me to recognize the face of God in the faces of those most violated and forgotten, in those who suffer, in those who are ignored, those that experience all kinds of rejection, epithets and exclusions.

Today the charism of the Congregation is so fresh and renewed, it shines with compassion and tenderness, and it is prophetic and focused on mission. It is so fruitful that it has been extended to laymen and women. In that way we join together in the world to put our hands, our feet and our heart in harmony of life and shared mission.
A CALL TO MERCY

On a day that did not seem to be different from any other day, I received an urgent call. A five-year-old girl had been abused, and her mother, her family and the whole neighborhood were in crisis. When I discovered my co-worker was the abuser, I remained silent, without words, without thoughts. I felt a cold and hard silence surround me, as if we were all frozen in time.

However, the girl, the family and the community needed attention. There was no time to think; just time to do my best, so restorative action could be quick and timely. I tried to bring everything into play that would help me to give support and bring hope to this family. It was then that I remembered something I had read about Maria Droste a few days ago. In 1888, while visiting the Darfield Hospital with her mother Maria came across a girl who was in great difficulty. Maria overcame her timidity and the displeasure of her mother, and went to the girl who had fallen into disgrace. It could be said that this was her first contact with the charism of the Good Shepherd Sisters.

When I finally met the girl I realized that she did not speak Spanish because she was indigenous. Her mother’s face was marked by pain and anger, and everyone was silent. It was at that moment that I forgot everything I knew. It was only the love of God within me that moved me to give comfort, offer healing, and attempt to repair so much pain. It was only the compassionate and merciful love of God present within that overcame my limited words expressed in gestures, welcome, respect, and kindness.

Finally the girl smiled at me and her mother became my interpreter. The girl slowly calmed down and I was able to evaluate her general condition and take care of her family.

A new face of God had appeared in my path. Through the wounded, injured, and needy I have witnessed his mercy within me, I feel called to reflect on it, and bring peace to the lives of people who have been wounded by injustice and violence.

May the passion of Mary Droste for the Heart of the Good Shepherd, source of tenderness, compassion and mercy, draw us into her personal closeness with the Lord, so that all of our lives will be a presence of his love!
Contemplating the Good Shepherd, we seek to follow in his footsteps. In the contemplative life of the Good Shepherd, in this incessant praise of the Blessed Trinity, we feel happy dedicating our lives for the sake of Mission. To contemplate is to love. It is to love in depth so the beauty of the image of God in each person, where it is falsified, is restored. We seek to live with authenticity and responsibility in community. We live in constant discernment seeking to be faithful to the call of Saint Mary Euphrasie: to follow Jesus Good Shepherd and to bring the "Good News of liberation to the oppressed, to the captives and to the blind." (Luke 4, 18-19); and announce to the world the goodness and tenderness of God, which is Mercy.

“Where our action does not reach, our prayers reach.”
I was born in a Catholic family—four boys and six girls. My older sister is a religious of another congregation, as well as four of my cousins. In my adolescence and youth, my mother took me to parish activities and activities guided by religious groups.

Periodically, I would talk to the Prioress at the Carmel, who encouraged my awakening to the contemplative life. However a priest, my confessor and Chaplain of the Good Shepherd of Recife, who also admired and was a propagator of our charism, assisted me. He helped me to understand that I could respond to the two calls I felt in my heart: contemplation and missionary action.

At the age of 22, I was a teacher and entered the Congregation. After my profession I was sent to various apostolic missions with people in different situations of social vulnerability: adolescents, the elderly, migrants, prisoners, rural women, and people living on the streets at the peripheries of big cities. I have also worked in initial formation: with candidates, novices and sisters in temporary commitment.

Considering these many and varied missions after sixty-five years of consecrated life I ask myself how have I lived the integration of action and contemplation. I came to the conclusion that in my youth I was not as clearly aware as I am now of the merciful presence of God in my life.

I remember the suffering I experienced in very difficult missions that asked for a complete surrender of myself. Whenever I implored God’s grace and the strength to continue, I experienced the tenderness of the love of God.

And now, at 87, sick, and living in a community of 32 older sisters, I ask, how can I live this integration? I think that my option to live an apostolic life – to live the passion of Jesus, the Good Shepherd, in search of the sheep that stray from his fold, was, is, and will always be my goal. As a consecrated apostolic religious, I never wanted and I do not want to live an exclusive spirituality of God and myself. I desire to continue growing in love, and I understand that it is about living in a relationship of God-myself-the-other in my brother and/or sister.

With age, I have limitations in walking but I can hear, feel, think, pray, preach, love and contemplate. Yes, to contemplate, to understand, every person I encounter is possible. And, I do so with wonder at the many gifts God has given to them in His infinite love. This discovery elevates my heart to Jesus in thanksgiving.

May God who is Love help me, in my old age to see with the eyes of God his presence in everything and in all!
I totally agree with the statement, "The integration of contemplation and action is an ongoing challenge for us." May Jesus Good Shepherd grant me the grace to be faithful and persevering in that quest!
PRAYER BECOMES LIFE WHEN WE WELCOME PERSONS WHO ARE ADDICTED

It is enough to take a tour of history to meet so many holy people, able to renew answers and mark the lives of those who, in the here and now, continue to seek to be living images of the Good Shepherd in the world.

Maria Droste became an exemplary Shepherd marked intensely by zeal for the salvation of persons. She followed in the footsteps of Mother Mary Euphrasia. She was deeply in love with the merciful Heart of Jesus. In him she found her reason for being, and the strength to go in search of the lost sheep. She had one purpose: "Bring them into the fold and surround them with the most delicate tenderness and mercy."

Centuries pass and our legacy lives on. Zeal for the salvation of persons continues to urge and impel us to be agents of mercy in those places where God is not present. Addiction is one of those places. This human misery touches our Shepherding instincts as it is a disease that victimizes persons snatching everything from them and subjecting them to a difficult, painful existence.

Addiction is an obsession and a desire to consume that slowly destroys lives leaving little hope. The addicts roam the streets by night or by day like sheep without a Shepherd. It seems that everything is lost and in the darkness of their night death seems the only hope. However, it is never too late as there is no human condition in which the Good Shepherd's mercy does not appear as a light of hope and life.

The Holy House of Saint Gabriel was founded to help those suffering from addiction. It is an instrument of hope, an embrace of mercy, and an encounter with the dignity which the Father endows upon each of his children. It is the hand that shows the port for the lost ships. It is the answer to the inheritance that holy and merciful women have bequeathed to us and we have continued to keep alive through our sense of welcoming, respecting and inviting others to change. The warmth and charity of the Home is one of the most valuable rehabilitation tools.

In surprising ways, we listen to the call of the Good Shepherd and create life through prayer and action. We live an ardent zeal for the salvation of the people, deeply loving each one of the boys we welcome into the Home. The harvest will not always be as we wish, but the zeal of the Shepherd will go with them and they will be sure that in God's fold they will always be loved.
In 1967 I entered the novitiate and in 1969 I pronounced my first vows. I was filled with energy and with desires to be holy.

Our formation consisted in fulfilling the law. The time for prayer consisted of communal prayer – Lauds, Vespers, the Rosary, points for meditation, etc.

The spiritual exercises consisted of various conferences each day with little time for a personal encounter with Jesus.

In the course of time I have had many difficulties integrating action and contemplation, I thought they were two separate things. Over the years I have understood that creation and contemplation are united and cannot be separated. Jesus showed me the way. He was active and took time out for contemplation, especially when he had important issues to solve. When it was time to choose the twelve apostles, he retired to the desert to pray.

Lectio Divina has been very helpful to me in my contemplation of the Gospels and in my experience of incarnational prayer. I do not always achieve this grace; it is a struggle every day.

Also, I have found it helpful to contemplate creation and I try to deepen in me the sense of God’s created marvels. God, who has given humanity so much and continues to do so.

Thank you, Lord, for the marvels you had done in my life and for your infinite mercy. You have sustained me and continue to do so.

I am not worthy of so much goodness, but HERE I AM. Thank you, Lord.
Living the challenge of integrating a contemplative life and action is a constant in our lives, beginning from the earliest years of formation. For us they are two inseparable realities.

We know from experience that placing God at the center of every event and moment of our lives is the driving force of all apostolic action.

At the same time, we are aware that growing in true prayer-contemplation is born of charity.

We have discovered that contemplation impels us to action, to the need to alleviate the suffering of the neediest (Action) and in turn the contact with suffering turns us towards God (Contemplation).

We appreciate that as we age and we are not as apostolically engaged as in the past, the contemplation-action relationship is lived in a more serene and integrated way.
It is a joy for me to share my personal experiences with my sisters.

The Lord has given me the grace to integrate and live contemplation and action. This is precisely what I have lived throughout my religious life of many years which seems to have just begun yesterday.

We were taught that the voice of the bell is the voice of God who calls us to the next responsibility. This is the beloved's call and time which I consecrate to Him. Today the voice of the bell is silent, however the clock marks the hour of the next encounter.

The Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours is time given by Him and for Him. I live contemplation and action for the mission. I consecrate my daily actions for the salvation of all peoples and the needs of the world and humanity.
Testimony 57
Sr. María de la Luz González Díaz / Mexico

My life has been a response to Love manifested in the infinite Mercy of the Divine Heart of Jesus. This name was given to me at the beginning of my novitiate. It is the Divine Heart of Jesus who gave meaning to my vocation. It was not something given to me. It was an encounter—a meeting with the One who calls us. Since I have discovered this great Love in the different countries and continents where I have been sent, I have seen different faces of God, whether in Africa, Europe or Mexico. This leads me to say that I am not of a single country. I am in the heart of those whom I have discovered in my walk of 54 years of service, and in those I find along my path - all of whom I have Loved. From that day when Love revealed himself, I discovered and understood that I am nothing without the Other.

Some years ago, I became conscious and grasped, for the first time that my response to the call of God was at one with the empty and distressed look of a thirteen-year-old girl. She had been abandoned when she was only six months old. The grandmother picked her up from a garbage dump, and at the age of thirteen her uncle raped her. To preserve the honor of her grandmother’s house and her grandmother’s 27-year-old son she ran away. She was pregnant and gave birth to an infant she did not want. In fact, she wanted him to die. I told her to love him, he is your baby, he is so small. With tears and in deep sadness she responded to me saying: “How do you want me to want him, or to love him when I do not know what it is to love?”

Without having an answer and with pity, I found myself turning away from her question. Later on, thinking about this experience I realized that no one can give what they do not have. And, I turned my eyes to heaven and asked my God to strengthen my love so that I, in turn, may be love wherever I go, giving it to those who need him. And so, I began my life of love when I made my commitment in this Congregation on July 5, 1965.

Since then, for me, there is no action without contemplation. I enter into contemplation in emptiness and silence and in the most arid and desert moments in which I find myself. Even in my illnesses I feel and I see with greater clarity that my actions and my life are surrendered to my Creator. I also ask for advice from the Blessed Virgin, who kept everything in her loving heart.

I think it is in contemplating human misery and nature in its various forms, however great or small, that I learn to contemplate the beauty and goodness of God and to respect it. When I pray, I reflect on the events of the world, which helps me to discover the Heart of the living and wounded Jesus who asks to be attended to and liberated. And this is needed more than ever in today’s society. This is all that I can humbly share. Thank you
The integration of contemplation and action is a daily and challenging task as the title of this project states.

I entered the novitiate before the Second Vatican Council, with the fervor and the certainty that loving and serving God and neighbor above all things come first.

The era was tinged with spirituality separated from action, and reinforced with formalisms (modesty, sacrifices, faults, etc.).

We were told about blind obedience. I read beautiful examples that inspired me, in small and great things (joys, trials or sacrifices). This strengthened me in love and trust in God and for my neighbor.

After the Second Vatican Council, the Spirit of God entered, opening, blowing, and dusting out the house. The Spirit insisted on contemplation and action embodied in the Gospel.

Jesus lives and prays with the people. In the critical moments of decision, Jesus retires to speak with his Father.

In the midst of ups and downs, I am living this incarnation, filled with the merciful love the Lord has for me. Every day I offer Him my thanksgiving and bring to him suffering humanity that has been abused by the selfishness of others.
The road to the centenary of the death of Sister María Droste (✝08.06.1899), places us openly on the steps in the life and death of our sister María Agustina Rivas(✝27.09.1990).

Why join Aguchita with Maria Droste? They were two women who had not forgotten that life, passion, death and resurrection form an indivisible whole that breaks into the mystery of the Cross and the Resurrection of the Lord of History.

On September 27, 1990, twenty-five years ago, in the midst of violence and political turmoil in our homeland, a terrorist group brutally ended the life of Sister Agustina Rivas, our Aguchita. It was an ultimate offering.

Maria Droste also gave herself over to martyrdom. She was aware of what it means to accompany those who carry in their bodies the signs of torture and suffering, sickness and exclusion. This was, for her, a daily martyrdom.

We do not glory in their martyrdom rather, we remember their examples which we bring into our contemplation and seek to internalize it. Our memory of them helps us to choose a different way of living community life and mission. Truly, they give us the example and courage to be "witnesses" and be close to the people who suffer. "I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly" (Jn. 10, 10).

How can we live the challenge of integrating contemplation and action?

- **Comparing our faith with the faith life of M. Droste and Aguchita.** Like them, we want to be able to confirm our fidelity to Christ, "loving to the end" (Jn. 13, 1). We opt for the renewal of our life. We are accompanied, personally and in community by a religious of another Congregation: Sr. Evelin Bloch, OSB.

- **From the perspective of our life and mission.** "Do this in memory of Me." It is a mandate and we cannot remain passive in silent self-centered contemplation. We renew our lives from a continual evaluation of our projects.

- **With witnessing.** "They shall be my witnesses" (Acts 1: 8). We want to bear witness to Jesus—to his life, person, death and resurrection for the salvation of the suffering world. In our apostolic commitment, we offer our presence and concern to girls, young people and families who have difficulties, at all levels. We are open to hosting survivors of human trafficking.

- **We are sent to "announce" from an ecological option.** Yes, "to announce" is above all to be. We develop projects like "Euphrasia - ecological", "Aguchita - ecological", and we will insert "Ma. Droste - ecological".
We review our community projects so that the Spirit will give us a more real and united commitment. We want to encourage life in the daily and simple, responding to the last calls of the CLT.

We renew the liturgy. We commit ourselves to being "living images" of the Gospel by a communal witness of religious life, families, ecclesial communities. We make an effort to live on-going incarnate prayer, with theological reflections, retreats, etc.

Being signs of solidarity/communion. We attempt to live in communion so that His Name may be sanctified and that "all may be one and the world may believe" (Mt 6, 9). We witness to living in a manner desired by Christ as a single flock under one shepherd, as did Maria Droste and Aguchita.
LYRICS OF A SONG ON BLESSED MARIA DROSTE

Refrain:

You are a Shepherdess who risks; you are a missionary of love,
You are a confident messenger, attentive to Jesus in your heart.

1. Blessed Maria Droste, from the garden of the Good Shepherd
   Your presence today refreshes us, and fills us with courage.
   German flower and of Porto, your faithful surrender to Love,
   made you a shining Shepherdess of the Church today.

2. Consistency in your life attracted the blessing,
   And you lift tenderly, the woman in solitude.
   Bless our efforts today, to respond with courage,
   And preserve the freshness of our Congregation.

3. Your life today calls us, to a bold conversion,
   to listen to the new signs of justice, love and peace.
   Blessed Maria Droste, of tenderness and fervor,
   We want to be transparent and committed as well.

4. The world needs you, come quickly to the altar,
   Many women wait, you lead them to God.
   The world needs you, for its transformation,
   Your holiness helps us, to draw near to God.
For me the integration of contemplation and action is a process.

My first stage of formation in the consecrated life was marked by the Greek dualism: the active life, centered on the tasks of the apostolate, and my contemplative life lived in prayer. Prayer was an exercise of concentration to get away from the daily worries and separate myself from reality and thus be able to savor in a disembodied god life outside of history and daily life. In this stage of my life, contemplation was a way of seeking and experiencing tranquility, and inner peace.

It struck me, however, that our Holy Mother strongly insisted on working generously and praying, praying always: "If you want to have strong ardor and zeal for the salvation of people, beloved daughters, pray a lot. If not in God, where will you find the means necessary to fulfill your mission? The more animated a religious is in the spirit of her vocation, the more attracted she is to prayer, and in prayer she finds the strength she needs to work effectively in the work of salvation."

So, it is in closeness to Jesus, in being with Jesus that moves me onward.

In Latin America and, of course, in Chile, after the Second Vatican Council, a group of theologians began to systematize the faith experience of our peoples. It was called "Theology of Liberation." This consists of reading the Gospel in light of the praxis, the present realities and life. The lived experience of Jesus was at one with his contemplative experience. His life is fruitful and is manifested in his offering of freedom to the people near to him. Thus, the Gospels show us Christ at prayer—those strong moments in which he reveals himself and expresses the depth and longings of his soul.

I participated in these faith communities. From these remarkable experiences with the people of God I learned and realized that there is no separation between contemplation and action. The world, reality, every person, everything is a holy place where God is manifested. All is encounter with this compassionate and merciful God who creates history with us, walks with us and looks on us with affection and kindness. This open-eyed contemplative attitude is what I strive to strengthen within myself. Then I will discover his call to me in those who suffer, in my commitment to social transformation, and in my action in favor of justice. This was a beautiful and transformative experience for me.

Later, on knowing and living the itinerary of prayer and life of Saint John Eudes, I realized this was his precise experience:

- "I love Jesus and nothing more," he loved to say. In other words, his first reference in his entire journey was to turn to Jesus, from where all light and life came to him.
He saw Jesus and his love in all things and in every situation, and he could not fail to give thanks, to contemplate this loving presence, even in the moments when he had to face contradictions and crosses in his effort to build the reign of God in people’s hearts.

In the face of the immeasurable love of God he saw his weakness and at the same time he felt embraced by the mercy of the Father who strengthened and renewed his dedication and zeal for the Kingdom.

Today, I can testify from my experiences that "feeling the love of God in the beating of my heart" provokes the response of full availability to the continuous calls from daily life that calls me to build the Kingdom of God and his justice. I do so in the certainty that everything else will be given to me in addition (Cf. Mt.6, 33), and in response to so much love received.
I am 83 years old. I was born in Santiago de Chile and I entered the postulancy at the age of 20 in Angers. As a young girl, I had an intuitive contemplative response to nature—to the infinite sea, the sky, the stars, the desert, the countryside with animals, the hills, and the trees. All led me to God. At night, I visualized God as an immense sphere full of colorful luminous dots. I enjoyed these experiences. This vision was like nothing else, and it was incongruent with what I was being taught at school.

During the missions in the country where I spent my summer vacation, I was inspired with devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. I had an aunt who told me about Saint Teresa of Avila and Saint John of the Cross and they were of great interest to me. This occurred after my mother's death.

As a teenager, I liked to read writers such as Aldous Huxley, Herman Hesse and Thomas Merton, *(The Seven Story Mountain)* who were of particular interest to me). I was also drawn to Buddhism and Hinduism. I particularly loved the poetry of Pablo Neruda in "El Canto General." He studied piano and composition. Music, especially that of Johann S. Bach, brought me into a special state of union with everything, with beauty and spirit.

The Gothic and Romanesque sacred art was, for me, a great instructor in contemplation. This static beauty spoke to me of the beyond, of mystery, and as a teacher it strengthened the seeds of my religious roots. I also experienced the flexibility of the body by practicing and watching ballet. Through these experiences I became linked with God through the beautiful.

As a postulant and in the novitiate the silence, the solemn Liturgy, the great feasts of Christmas, Resurrection and Pentecost, as well as Holy Week brought me closer to the great mysteries of faith. I read many lives of the Saints and I learned they were always ahead, "beyond" the common.

As for the action, all this time I lived rather well, without lacking in the joy and the ability to encourage and be creative at celebrations. I had to learn to be a member of a community, to love my sisters, to be more humble. I read different books on the life of Christ trying to increase faith in Him. It was helpful to read "The Christ of Faith" by Karl Adam. I saw action as part of my congregational participation through obedience and our charism.

In ministry, with young women, I tried to be innovative and use new methodologies and was involved in evangelization. I also took them on outings and planned parties with the help of other sisters. I felt it was the mission of the Congregation. I think that contemplation was the underlying impulse to my creativity and moved me to give myself more and more to young women.
Later, through friendships, and courses on Vatican II, I became more socially conscious. This was a challenge for me to live in a balanced manner. Currently I’m still searching. My heart is never quiet, and my thirst needs the living waters. I continue to run alongside Christ urged by the Spirit who travels the world, rather the universe. Jesus left, returned to the Father’s bosom. And I consider myself an itinerant follower, living in a spiral where I am engaging these dimensions of contemplation and prayer and action, with ups and downs.

“Do not forget that by love you will conquer hearts to the Lord.”

- St. Mary Euphrasia -