

NCVR Eastern Region October 16-18, 2017

Present were: Sr. Mary McGarrity, Chairperson; Sr. Elizabeth Castro, HMSP; Sr. Catherine Cleary, PBVM; Sr. Joan Daniel Healy, SCC; Sr. Theresia Maria Holschlag, CSP; Sr. Paulina Hurtado, OP; Sr. Gilmary Kay, RSM; Sr. Maryann Seton Lopiccolo, SC; Sr. Patricia Moran, CIJ; Sr. Maria Luz Ortiz, MHSH; Sr. Ann David Strohming, OSF; Sr. Aquinas Scott, CSFF; Sr. Jean Thompson, OSF; Sr. Geraldine Wodarczyk, CSFN.

Our presenters, Sr. Mary Hughes, OP, and Sr. Clara Kreis, CDP were present for the entire conference.

After an opening prayer on Monday October 16, after lunch, all were welcomed by Sister Mary McGarrity, chairperson, who introduced Sr. Catherine Cleary PBVM, to lead us into prayer of Contemplative Listening. Prior to the meeting, we had received from Sr. Catherine readings for our reflection on some of what is happening today in our religious life: from LCWR, *The Future Enters Us Long Before It Happens*, the Presidential Address given by Mary Pelligrino, CSJ at the August Assembly in Orlando, Florida; from Global Sisters Report, *Transformation – An Experiment in Hope* a summary of the report given by Marcia Allen in her presidential address given to the LCWR Assembly; and *Finding Love in Many Places*, the write-up on the Giving Voice meeting from this summer.

Sr. Catherine led us in a contemplative dialogue, *Unleashing the Transformative Power of Communal Wisdom* : Contemplative Listening, and Contemplative Speaking.

After a short break, Sister Mary Hughes, OP was introduced. Mary is Director of Transitional Services, for the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR). Her services are available to all, especially small communities in need. The title of Mary's presentation is:

“Options for the Future”

Mary spoke of these communities and their need to assess their vulnerabilities, and make plans for the future. NRRO has identified at least 84 communities that are small, poor, and not connected to anyone. The healthiest plans come out of relationships. Support comes geographically rather than from charisms. Religious life reinvents itself every 500 years, and we are on the cusp of another 500 years. Religious life in the US today is definitely made up of older religious, and smaller congregations. Big adjustments have been and continue to be made. If we consider being “older”, look at Pope Francis! We are now

“lighter”; what we had was more cumbersome. Our lives are more suitable to our age, more collaborative. Our lives are focused more on MISSION, rather than Ministry. Presence is important.

Some points to consider:

Mission:

Are you currently able to carry out your mission? Pay attention to these areas as some of what happens will happen by default.

How do you promote and provide the spiritual life of your members? Sometimes prayer schedules get shifted when there is too much to do. It is the prayer that counts.

Leadership/Governance:

Are there sufficient numbers of members available and capable of serving the various leadership roles? How many years will these persons be able to continue?

At last election, how many members were nominated for leadership? How many withdrew their names?

Members:

How many members?

Formation, if you have an intergenerational community?

Novices:

Have there been any novices in your institutes in the last ten years?

Are they still members?

Sponsored Apostolate/Ministry:

Does your institute have sponsored ministries?

Properties and Plant:

Closing Houses- whom do you consult?

Have you assessed the utilization of your facilities?

Do you intend to keep/maintain your houses as long as possible or look to other possibilities - sharing space with other congregations

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Retirement and Health Care:

Is your retirement fund adequate for now and future?

Are health insurance and annual benefit programs adequate?

Cemetery:

Do you have your own cemetery?

Have provisions been made for care of cemetery when the institute can no longer do so. Who will do the permanent care when a community comes to completion?

External Support:

Do you receive or expect support from general leadership when you no longer can carry on?

Are you considering outsourcing management functions or titles?

(Example:

There are five communities in Wisconsin who have formed a Religious Collaborative; they are forming a management company. Everything will be taken care of by that group: this piece is taken away from leadership. Those in geographic areas are working together.)

Are you considering a partnership, covenant, with another community?

Vital Documents:

Are Articles and By-Laws up to date?

In writing, what is to happen to your assets/property when institute reaches completion? Is dissolution clause included in the articles of corporation?

Mary reminded us to remember the Grit and the Grace of the Founders.

Leave room for God's surprises.

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After dinner there was time for discussion, followed by evening prayer.

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Tuesday, October 17 began with Mass and Breakfast. Mary Hughes then continued her presentation, offering information on resources and options for diminishing congregations.

RCRI has workshops for completing communities. Toolbox: on line resource.

Possible Options:

~Disband: Simply divide up your resources and make individual choices about where to go.

~Congregations can merge: however, the time for merging is over.

In any choice you make, there is a choice.

~You can create something new- this takes inner work ahead of time. It is difficult: there is no such thing as “the way we always did things”.

~Abdicate leadership; some just can’t do it, but the grace of leadership is there.

~Organic Unions: there is a Canadian model, more secure: Many Motherhouses: building one big one. Hire an executive director to handle finances. The Board is the leadership from the participating congregations, and will elect a leader eventually.

~Elect the youngest for life. (checks and balances?)

~Partner with a Health Care Congregation- to be cared for in a specific community.

~Pontifical Commissary: Commissary : One sent on a mission. Might be able to trade off leadership.

If you don’t do planning, things will happen by default.

~Province discernment: An international order in Maine did not want to go back to France. They had meetings to decide who would do what service, e.g., someone to visit the sick, someone for spiritual life, some for activity for all retired. (Maine has the largest number of retired persons in the country). They went through a period of spiritual discernment-lists-listening-prayer. Then each one named a name for each of the services; did not repeat a name.

~Contemplative and Apostolic: The Oldenberg Franciscans covenanted with the Carmelites of Indianapolis. The Rochester Minnesota Franciscans and the Poor Clares.

~Congregation of Sisters and Congregation of Priests.

~Covenanting- International relationship

Covenanting is not in law.

We are the pioneers for the future.

After a short break, our next presenter was introduced: Sister Maria Clara Kreis, CDP, who comes to us from Allison Park, PA. The title of Sister Clara’s presentation is:

Consecrated Life: its Core Values & meaning for a Global World

On a grant from the Hilton Foundation Sister Clara is currently doing research on Life Satisfaction for Apostolic Women Religious. The United States is a pioneer in studying this. In 2011 the UISG saw a decline in Europe’s Religious Congregations. Now it has moved to the United States. In Europe, some congregations had lay CEOs. Some of them took their money.

If we can help get enough sisters to participate in the assessment instrument it may answer the question, “how do we come to decisions for the future?” The instrument will be a tool to look at not only what do I need to change and grow, but how can it help all. Sister spoke of the open, deep and sharing of women religious who responded to her dissertation project, and those who currently participate can see some answers to the questions of “why sisters come and why they stay.”

The Logo on the title page represents the Visitation, sacred sharing among women.

Some key points include:

Why reflect on “satisfaction with religious life”? Many young people are coming to us today from having had the experience of being volunteers in mission. The Mission comes from the faith relationship with God that brings us together in community.

Core values/Elements of Religious Life – Authenticity – Are we who we say we are? Sign of joy and commitment – We are “pruned” now with the numbers.

St. Francis and Pope Francis both manifest an urgent response to the needs of the time.

Worldwide concerns and preferential option for “whom?”

New Members: what are they seeking? “ Intergenerational”

What is our response as vowed religious?

Alternative responses to world concerns.

Core Values:

Congregational Character (Profile)

Leadership

Individual well being – how satisfied are we with the life we chose.

Membership Viability

Holistic growth and commitment

Inter-relationships | inside community- outside community

Activity – main reason why you came to religious life: models, parents, and sisters in school.

Main reasons that motivate you to stay

Spirituality.

How shall we respond?

Reflect: What do you NOT need?

Prune ourselves.

After lunch, in her next presentation, Clara introduced the LSSWR flyer: Life Satisfaction Scale for Apostolic Women Religious. An assessment tool for sisters.

Sister Clara explained the purpose of the LSSWR, its history, its benefits, and the areas of assessment. Clara has offered her contact information, and urges us to present this assessment tool to as many sisters as possible. Contact Sister Maria Clara Kreis, CDP, PhD, LP to be able to access the tool. See attached flyer.

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Evening prayer *Autumn Blessings*, was led by Sister Ann David Strohming, OSF.

After dinner the Business Meeting was held: Elections were chaired by Sister Maryann Seton Lopiccolo, SC.

Election Results are as follows:

Chairperson: Sr. Ann David Strohming, OSF

Secretary: Sr. Paulina Hurtado, OP

Treasurer: Sr. Catherine Cleary, PBVM

Thanks offered to the outgoing officers, Sr. Mary McGarrity, IHM, Chairperson, and Sr. Patricia Moran, CIJ, Secretary.

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Mass, breakfast and departure: Wednesday, October 17.

Save the Date: Sister Ann David has made arrangements for 2018 at Mount Alvernia: October 23, 24, 25. The theme will be Gratitude and Hope.

