

**Discerning our Emerging Future: A Congregation Zoom Discussion
December 1, 2020**

Feedback

Where do you find hope/possibility for the mission of religious life/IHM life?

Sacred Heart Group:

- Our meeting the difficult things of the past:
 - a) Mother Theresa's story in itself
 - b) The splitting of the Congregation in PA – early days
 - c) The Motherhouse fire
 - d) Adapting to Vatican II

Nazareth Community:

- We find hope in the fact that we are not alone in the mission of religious life. Each religious congregation has its own charism; working together we form a mosaic where each congregation brings its own special gifts to the people of God. We can do together what no one congregation can do alone. We also found hope in the fact that when we were being investigated by Rome many lay people rose to our defense and articulated what Sisters had done for the mission of the Catholic church.

Little Flower Convent:

- Offers hope that this conversation is energizing - sparks thoughts- gives hope
- Have hope in continual exploration of discipleship. Reference in our Mission Statement "to follow Jesus as a community of disciples". What does this phrase mean to us now and how can we witness this among those we are called to serve in whatever way we can?

Group 1:

- For the majority of our time together, we focused on both the IHM History of Coming Together with other Congregations - Tri-IHM, Oblates of Providence, Srs. of St. Casimir, Srs. of Cyril/Methodius - on a Corporate level and all the inter-Congregational living experiences individual Sisters have experienced - and how any conversation about any further merging of

Religious Life is a comfortable space to be in now...as it has been so much a part of our IHM Journey thus far. This "coming together" also seems to be rooted in the desire and prayer of Theresa Maxis and her own life's journey.

Group 2:

- The LCWR video set the tone. The four presenters' message of not fixating on the numbers gave encouragement and hope to open spaces for possibility.
- Our history shows that there was a small number of women who began the three congregations we now know as Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.
- There is inspiration from the example of the Sisters of St. Casimir and the covenant we have with them. They continue in their mission in spite of diminishing numbers. Their mission has been caught by many whom they have served.
- There is hope for us in the way so many sisters are engaged in this conversation.
- The collective conversation with other congregations develops an emerging consciousness of the collective WE.
- Hope is found in the message of Jesus: "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst." Our core value of community is a gift we can share in community building and can grow in forming relationships beyond membership. There are so many people today longing for community and belonging.

Group 3:

- There is hope in that LCWR has taken the initiative to use the data from the CARA study to gather congregations in conversation about our emerging future.
- There is hope that a spirit of collaboration is emerging in service of the whole of religious life beyond an individual congregation's preservation.

Group 4:

- We find hope in the example of our Founders who took risks, stepped up to the challenge and brought us to where we are today. Now it's our turn! We are being called to move from *I* to *we*, from IHM mission to the mission of Jesus.

- We have example in our younger sisters who already join with members of other Congregations in their formation activities and find it enriching and hope-filled.
- ...a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom. (Is.11:1) God can and does bring forth life where it doesn't seem possible.

Group 5:

- Freedom to respond to the invitation to new ministries. We have not been in the practice of staffing our sponsored ministries so we feel the freedom to explore new ministries and respond to God's call to serve in many places.
- We have hope that so many IHM Sisters already work/live collaboratively with other religious. It's not a new idea for us.
- We take the time to look at ourselves and our relationships – racism, LGBTQ, etc.

Group 8:

- In our history: The way the Sisters of the past took risks in founding Marywood, sending Sisters to Peru and joining Social Security among other choices.
- The Sisters in this country, and in our IHM congregation, are very creative women.
- Women religious have made such a difference for the world. People recognize this and trust us to reach out to the needs of the people of God.
- Our younger Sisters have had numerous inter-congregational experiences. Their first-hand experience in this area will assist us as we move forward to minister with other Sisters.
- As our numbers decrease, we will hopefully realize that it is the quality of our relationships that will matter the most. We have been doers in the past, but the future may call us to learn from others and move into a ministry of accompaniment.
- During this time of Covid, people have found new ways to connect, and so have we as IHM's.
- The question for the future is, what is the true essence of religious life?

Group 9:

- Good to hear we are moving beyond the numbers in the future
- The importance to see the other side and possibilities; who we are becoming
- Acknowledge the importance of moving forward different and willing to let go
- Thinking of Teresa Maxis; her life was not what she expected but one of ongoing disappointment; God will fashion something wonderful in our future
- Fr. Gilet “if I can’t find sisters, I will make them. Will we continue the IHM Mission in Peru. There is HOPE on the margin; our future rests in the hands of God
- Contemplative dialogue empowers us to be open to new possibilities; to God’s divine providence

Group 11:

- Hope is found in our younger IHM members as well as in younger members being drawn to religious life throughout the world.
- Hope in the fact that the future will happen, little by little, until it becomes the present.
- We keep muddling along together, keep getting pushed out of our comfort zones, but solid in the belief that God is in the thick of it.
- It was comforting to hear that the numbers, the statistics, about the future of religious life, are not the most important thing.
- The numbers can be the motivators for us to prove the numbers wrong, to defy the numbers, so to speak.
- We are all on a journey together, to our borders and beyond, always for the sake of the mission> Like Teresa, always going “where the life is.”
- The data gives us a sense of urgency on this journey.
- Sr. Elvia shared that in Mexico, religious communities are not thinking about the future in the same way, because it is not an urgent reality for them, as the communities are bigger. She feels that it is a BRAVE thing to do what we are doing, going out into an unknown future.

Group 12:

- We found the report hopeful, challenging, positive, and inspiring.

Group 13:

- We took so many risks in the past; we hope that we can meet those risks
- Hope in the diversity of younger membership
- Hope in the energy of our community wanting to inquire about racism, LGBTQ issues, diversity, gender identity — perhaps this is taking us deeper into our living out our charism of God's unconditional love.

Group 14:

- There was hope in the realization that there were about 200 new vocations each year to religious life.
- Gratitude was expressed in our group for the leadership teams over time that have been opened minded and empowering of membership. It was noted that membership that is engaged and forwarded thinking is a blessing to the congregation and empowers leadership. It is a two way street for mission.

What invitations might lie ahead for our IHM community?

Sacred Heart Group:

- What is down the line?
 - a) More serious and official connections with other Congregations: Immaculata, Monroe, others?
 - b) Receiving "invitations from other Congregations (Srs of St. Casimir) and giving "invitations" to other Congregations- toward blending.
- Our mission is to be sent to be God's presence in the world.
- We need to model HOPE for God's people in the midst of our crisis in the Catholic Church. We miss our teaching mission in the schools – but maybe this teaching mission remains in other ways and places.

Nazareth Community:

- We feel that the mission that lies ahead for our IHM Congregation is to find the needs of the people and respond to them in whatever way we can. We know some of the problems facing us: racism, oppression of people, forming people's adult faith, a need to be really counter cultural. This is a pivotal moment in the history of religious life and we must find creative ways for congregations to work together, each bringing their own unique charism to respond to the needs of the people of God.

Little Flower Convent:

- Value the importance of having this conversation with other Congregations
- Coming together with all Congregations gives a broader perspective and offers more hope
- What was is no longer; need to explore "what is" at this time
- Perhaps our mission is helping people in new ways
- Contrast of mission /ministry is a new call to consider what we "do".
This call implies wisdom, prayer, faith sharing, discovering and valuing the gifts of our younger Sisters and how we can utilize these gifts
- Future structure will probably change for leadership; believe young sisters will have the grace to move us forward
- Consider the possibility of unifying the three IHM Congregations
- Given age and limitations, consider ways to serve the "spiritually" poor in our midst and parishes
- Consider ways to engage in new evangelization efforts needed after COVID
- Ditto to word "passion". Our Charism refers to the passionate spirit of St. Alphonsus. We need to ask ourselves what am I/we passionate about at this time in our lives and in what ways do we respond to that passion.
- Deepen relationships with other Congregations in order to keep members connected
- Continue to explore the role of Associates in the IHM and other Congregations, as a means of furthering the mission of religious life in the future.

Group 1:

- And, as we move forward with shaping a new Vision of Religious Life, we are also grateful for the experiences we have had in our coming together with the Sisters of St. Casimir....just as our Mother Cyril guided Mother Maria Kaupas on beginning a Religious Congregation...so, too, are the daughters of Maria Kaupas modeling for us how to face the future of our Religious Life without fear.

Group 2:

- In order to live the mission of God's redeeming love partnership with others and continued engagement in conversation have the potential to open opportunity for ministry.

- How might the understanding of membership evolve? Who among us might become part of something new? What logs need to be removed from the structures to open spaces for the new to emerge, to become fire? Where can the conversations begin...Associates, Nuns and Nones,...?

Group 3:

- There is an invitation to join in collaborative efforts from a sense of responsibility of the strength of our congregation but not with a sense of superiority but one of vulnerability.
- There is an invitation to look at what structures and institutions we may need to let go of to free ourselves and our energies to meet the needs of people on the margins.
- There is an invitation to look at our own white privilege and latent racism as we desire to align ourselves more authentically to the Gospel.
- It is not about preserving religious life as a life form but about furthering the mission of Jesus and the gospels.
- As we are able to let go of things, we will be freer to pursue passions and not be bound by administration.
- This is an opportunity to let go and make room for the new; some hard decisions must be made about what to let go of in the congregation to further the mission of religious life.
- This calls for more collaboration and conversations with other congregations geographically near (or perhaps far) to find ways to sustain the mission and the future of religious life.
- There is need to focus on the collective “we” rather than as individual congregations to come to a new place.
- There is an invitation to listen and find ways to support our newer members as we look to the future.
- Now is the time to begin the necessary right-sizing of the congregation which will include letting go of some of what has been precious to us: sponsored ministries, ways of administering the congregation, etc.
- There is a need to free newer/younger members for mission and not saddle them with the responsibility of administering the congregation for the next several decades. We should become active in the national initiative to look for ways to administer our congregations in new ways and across congregations.
- Are our present ministry commitments holding newer/younger members back from responding more nimbly to the needs of society?

- The call in our ministries today seems to be more about being in relationship with others, rather than in maintaining institutions.
- As a relatively larger congregation, we may be called to assume some responsibility for fostering religious life nationally.

Group 4:

- We're being invited to let go of the familiar, to open ourselves to new possibilities and to follow the example of our Founders in trusting that God will lead the way.

Group 5:

- We have had relationships with other congregations for a long time so talking about collaboration in religious life comes easy to us.
- We see this as a real possibility, though we will need to let old ideas go
- We will take it one day at a time

Group 8:

- We will want to join with others to minister to the people of God.
- We need to have serious and deep conversations about our legacy. What is the blessing we want to leave behind?
- An invitation to look intentionally at the future of our sponsored ministries.
- The Casmir Sisters have been a wonderful witness to us. We can learn much from how they are dealing with diminishment.
- Annunciation House in Texas is an excellent example of how different congregations have joined together to help immigrants. We need to be open to new ventures such as this, where we work with others.
- We are blessed by our Associates, who must be a part of our journey into the future.

Group 9:

- We are continually being invited to "Go where the life is" Discern where God is doing something new for us at this moment in time.
- We will need to step out of our comfort zone and move
- Will we be willing to pay attention to the invitation to respond to the current needs and realities of the people of God on the margins
- This is a new moment for us to redefine ourselves and allow the new

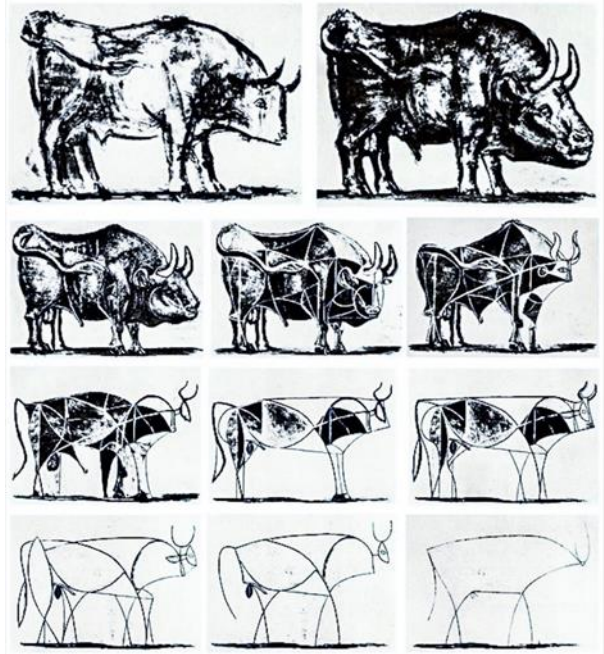
opportunities and invitations to find us

- Go where the need is will require us to let go.
- Called to live the gospel way more deeply
- Embracing the evolution of our call to religious for transformation to see in a new way
- As we celebrate 175 years of our founding, are we ready and willing to step into something new?
- This is a new moment for us to live authentically our vows and share the gift of our community spirit
- Now is the time for us to respond and lead the way forward.

Group 10:

- What if each Sister asks herself: WHAT IS MY PASSION? If we know what gives us passion and share that, we may find guidance for the future. No passion is irrelevant. “Where the passion of our hearts meets the needs of the world....”
- Naming of Creation Care as a value; practical, life-giving.
- It is important to “distill” down to the essence of Religious Life; let go of things that are no longer needed. We have let go of “formal education” and transitioned into more concrete areas/practical areas of working with those who are underprivileged.
- Imagine a different way of doing Chapter, NOW! Why wait? One may be called to leadership in another congregation or in other ways than what we know as “leadership” now.

- Perhaps we are called to live the essence of Religious Life. Pablo Picasso was a famous artist whose work has passed through various periods or stages. As a young artist he painted with great realism and added minute details to every work, including this particular lithograph of a bull. During his middle years, the bull drawing had less detail but one could certainly tell it was a bull. In his later years, Picasso drew the same bull with just a few simple strokes: The essence! Perhaps we need to go through a distillation to rid ourselves of what is not necessary and come to the essence! Perhaps the essence is our passion for mission.



Group 11:

- How can we facilitate the development of future leaders in our Church?
- How can we have a role in choices that our young Catholics make, not just for religious vocations, but for lay ministry in the future Church?

Group 12:

- Challenged to pray
- Challenged to be creative.
- Look at realities of religious life.
- Challenged to keep an open heart & mind to structural changes needed in government, community life, and mission.
- Look realistically at responsibilities of leadership—what can be done by other members, members of other religious communities and lay people.
- The basics of religious life have not changed.
- Everyone has a gift and purpose.
- We are the body of Christ.
- Openness to joining with members of other religious communities.

Group 13:

- Are we called to what we can do now that we couldn't do in the earlier days?
- Excitement and energy around collaboration; joining ministries, creating new public juridic persons, work yet to be done in justice, education, and we can partner on these issues
- We need to not be afraid of losing our identity in collaborating. There are ways we can work together without merging
- All communities are there for the mission, overlapping of charism
- There is a need for our charism and trans charisms are needed
- We're women religious with the message of Jesus. It's the gospel message we're spreading
- Several of us shared intercommunity and ecumenical experiences in ministry; experiences of inclusion; and these were life-giving experiences
- Covenant approach; would not want the last person to lose her identity.
- Would like to see more of us doing more, being more engaged.

Group 14:

- Our group spoke of sensing an invitation to stretch in new ways to other congregations for mission and looking for other ways to share and collaborate
- It was noted that we are gifted to be a congregation with membership from various countries and cultures and our group wondered if this was a gift was we approach a time where we are being invited to join with other congregation and groups of good will for ministry and mission. It is obvious that religious life is being called to flourish in new ways that we need to discover.
- This is a moment for consciously weaving a new tapestry of various charism in service of our world.
- These two quotes from past chapters seem to continue to hold meaning in the context of this conversation for us.

“Order and structure will domesticate the deep story and freeze it form.”

“All along the way is the way.” Saint Alphonsus