



Pre-Chapter Meeting Communique October 1, 2022

The first Pre-Chapter Meeting, open to the entire congregation, was held on Saturday, October 1, 2022, beginning at 9:30 a.m.

Rainfall greeted those attending the pre-chapter meeting, even before Sister Mary Ellen Tenny had a chance. Those in attendance would easily agree that joining with Sister Mary Ellen was the better choice! As she spoke, Sister Mary Ellen asked that we consider the simple suggestion to “listen,” for which she used the image of noise-cancelling “earbud.” But how and why would we need to eliminate the usual noises that surround us? We had joined for the day to discover, search, pair, and connect. As with using the earbuds, we had to be aware that we wanted to connect, be turned on to what we were hearing, discover multiple sources of information, and be ready to listen with heads free from other distractions.

She emphasized that in Chapter 2023, we would need to connect in a deeper way, asking “What is religious life in the world today?” She specifically referred to the word “listen,” given a specific importance in the chapter logo.

Our need to “listen” was further emphasized by Sister Catherine Bertrand following Sister Mary Ellen’s welcome. Most important for the chapter would be how we listen and how we move forward. As she indicated, we would need to meet each other differently and allow ourselves to be open to transformation.

Sisters Rose Patrice and Rosemary DePaul then followed with an opening prayer, asking: “Where are you now?” “What are your relationships?” We were further urged not to look outside ourselves for a leader. They added from a reading, “We are the ones we’ve been looking for.”

Our facilitators, Sister Joanne Hanrahan and Sister Catherine Bertrand, then asked us to view a short presentation: “What Do You Do with a Chance?” The story follows a little boy who loses his chance because of his indifference. On a second try, he fails to catch the chance after an unexpected fall. He eventually realizes, “I wouldn’t hold back next time.” One day a chance reappears, and his excitement outweighs his fear. He captures his chance, The facilitators asked, “How does this story relate to us?” Table groups then shared experiences about their chance experiences.

Following an explanation of the Big Picture concept, members were asked to share thoughts on “What matters most” to the community. Big Picture topics centered on the following: Prayerful, loving relationships within, among, and beyond the community; Responsible membership; Collaboration with and for mission.

After lunch Sisters returned to their tables to resume the meeting. The facilitators began with a prayer which included a reflection on a quote by Maria Schriver, who reminded her readers in *I've Been Thinking*, that the positive attributes that exist in others also exist in themselves. Schriver advised readers to see themselves through God's eyes and to surround themselves with others who valued them and also to value themselves.

The meeting continued with a “Conversation with the Chapter Planning Committee.” Members of the committee shared their process and experiences as they came up with the “Big Picture Topics.” For example, Sister Katie Clemmer shared that they went through the responses from the September 25, 2021, meeting and categorized them. Sister Kathleen Sabatino shared that she was most impressed by the reality that after coming back together after a time of personal prayer, the committee found that they were on the same page and felt the working of the Holy Spirit. Other insights were equally important and compelling.

The facilitators then instructed members at the tables to have conversations about the “Big Picture Topics” at their tables. Groups of tables were assigned a specific topic to discuss. The Sisters at the tables were to come up with one or two questions they would suggest that would provide a context or focus for this conversation. If there were topics not addressed in the Big Picture Topics suggested by the Chapter Planning Committee, they were to write them down and include a question for focused conversation.

After about 45 minutes of sharing, members of the gathering took a break and then gathered again for large group sharing. Each table was invited to share one of their focus questions with the assembly. The facilitators explained that these questions would lead to deeper conversations, and that the Planning Committee would be looking at all of these questions on Sunday.

In closing the meeting, Sister Sharon Hedrick reminded members to take time to ponder the responsibilities of joining with the chapter and to take time for contemplative reflection either privately or communally.

On a final note, Sister Mary Ellen took the opportunity to introduce Megan Capurso who entered the community in September. Megan was currently staying with the Sisters at Villa Maria, Greentree, and enjoying every moment!