



## Pre-Chapter Communiqué February 25, 2023

Sister Mary Ellen Tennyty began the pre-chapter meeting with reference to *More Together Than Alone, Discovering the Power and Spirit of Community in Our Lives and in the World*, a book by Mark Nepo, wherein the author contrasts Eastern and Western thought processes. The thought processes differ greatly. While Western thought tends to “include everything,” Eastern thought urges the thinker to go for the lines “that reveal the essence” of what is being considered. Sister Mary Ellen suggested that we need to do the same as we go through the chapter process. Our goal is to capture the essence of the work of the Spirit.

Following Sister Mary Ellen’s introduction, a period of prayer and reflection, centered on an adapted reading from Richard Rohr and Molly Baskette, led into a short sharing. The authors presented “evolutionary thinking” as the “very core concept of faith,” which might involve “letting go” from what we need to leave behind. Rather than centering our thoughts on presumed conclusions, we were urged to see the process as the goal and the ride as “destination” itself. The reading suggested that often the goal may never be clearly in sight; however, evolutionary thinking is contemplative thinking, which creates a space for the spirit within us.

Members of the present administration then shared in a “facilitated conversation” centered on questions from the chapter’s facilitators: Sister Catherine and Sister Joanne. Members of the administration were first asked to consider the blessings they have experienced in their current roles. The following blessings were mentioned without reference to specific members and do not include all the blessings mentioned! Some highlighted blessings included the following: knowing the gifts of our sisters; walking on “holy grounds” with our sisters; sharing the wisdom of our sisters in Camilla; sharing the love our younger sisters feel for the congregation; knowing the aspirations of our sisters; sharing both the sorrowful and joyful times of our sisters; valuing the availability of our sisters when it has been needed.

Members of the administration were then asked: “How do you cope with the stress of your position? Responses varied widely! Some included the following: developing a personal protocol that includes prayer, reading, social outings, being outdoors, “coloring,” keeping a sense of humor, reserving times to be together, and kayaking!

The following question required a different type of response: How has the concept of leadership shifted? Responses required the members to think seriously about their role as leaders. They suggested the following: leadership happens within current demographics and often requires changes; different capacities for leadership lead to collaboration with others; current needs often require fundamental changes; concern about current issues demands that we accept responsibility and move forward; micro-managing with our lay colleagues has required a wider thought process; various unexpected complexities need to be addressed.

Members were then asked: What have you learned about dealing with conflicts? Responses included the following: not to react too quickly; to step away to a contemplative stance; to look within myself and ask, “What is triggering my response;” to look to humility as a solution and know, “I may not have the solution. Maybe I can’t be the fixer;” to know that an immediate response is not always needed.

Table conversations followed the lunch period. Participants were asked to discuss the following questions: (1) In light of what you heard from your present Council, what does it say to you about the role and work of leadership in the future? (2) Are there further questions/comments to leadership?

Questions from the table discussions were then addressed by members of the central administration. Questions included some of the following:

- Will there be a chance to discuss opportunities for future changes?
- What would you suggest for a circular model of leadership?
- What physical limitations should a sister consider for leadership?
- How do we look at entitlement as part of membership?
- Will there be a transition time between administrative teams?
- Are we considering electing team leadership rather than individuals who will become a team?
- How will we finance lay workers?
- How do we pass on our charism?
- Are there any plans for formation?

Administrators responded to many questions; they addressed financial decisions, entitlement, and membership; the need for lay leadership in many areas (e.g., fleet decisions and car issues, Stone Harbor issues); hiring an Executive Secretary. They emphasized that lay colleagues must be formed in the IHM charism, but they most often have skills that we don't have. Members of the administration have learned to listen to feedback from more qualified people.

Sisters Sharon Hedrick and Joseph Marie Carter next provided an overview for the *Personal Discernment for Leadership* process. Guidelines will be posted on the chapter website, but basically the process begins at this point. Sisters will be asked to respond whether they will be or can be open to a role of leadership within the community. This list will be communicated to the Congregation. A later list will be distributed naming the 25 sisters who received the highest number of recommendations. These sisters will participate in a discernment retreat the weekend of May 19-21, 2023, after which they will indicate whether they will continue in the process.

After sister observers left the meeting, a short meeting of delegates began. Sister Catherine and Sister Joanne, the chapter facilitators, provided and explained handouts and diagrams of *Dimensions of Leadership: Capacities, Skills and Competencies for Effective Leadership*, reflections provided by LCWR. Chapter delegates were urged to watch for "homework" for the March meeting. One delegate requested that all chapter materials be posted in the Sisters Section of the IHM website. It was agreed that that would help to clarify many points that may have been forgotten or overlooked along the way! For their part, delegates were urged to keep other sisters informed and to study and reflect on chapter materials.