



Pre-Chapter Meeting Communiqué

April 15, 2023

Sister Mary Ellen Tenny began the pre-chapter meeting with a warm welcome to our Peruvian Sisters who were able to join the meeting: Sisters Maria Theresa Scudellari and Ana Cristina Devoto; Sister Christine Virginia O'Donnell, regional superior in Peru, also attended. She also enthusiastically welcomed all the sisters who are attending the meeting online, especially the sisters in Camilla. She elaborated particularly on the pre-chapter meetings at Camilla and noted that information gleaned from those meetings had been added to the chapter's body of work.

Sisters Kathy Sabatino and Marianne Lallone then led those gathered in a short opening prayer with the timely thought, "We come in a spirit of gratitude to God who makes all things new."

The first half of the meeting was presented by the members of the General Administration. The emphasis of their presentation dealt with the report on the state of persons, discipline, and works since the last General Chapter.

Sister Mary Ellen first noted that the following sisters had been selected to complete a review of the Chapter reports: *States of Persons, Discipline, and Works and the Congregation's Financial Status 2018-2022*: Sister Paula Buley, Sister Anne Veronica Burrows, and Sister Lorraine McGrew.

Sister Mary Ellen began by stating that the framework of this report was created within a contemplative look and conversation around living our IHM Spirit in vibrant and tangible ways as was referenced by Chapter 2018. The framework included: Living our IHM Spirit in vibrant and tangible ways:

- through our response to Chapter 2018
- in the midst of the Challenges of a Global Pandemic
- with a Commitment to Global Consciousness
- as Consecrated Women of the Church
- cherishing and celebrating our IHM Legacy
- as we develop Congregational Strategic Initiatives
- while embracing Congregational Realities

The topics covered by the General Administration for this presentation are noted:

Sister Patricia McDermott initiated the report by recalling the renewed reflection on Alphonsian spirituality that we had emphasized in the 2018 chapter. As a result of this renewal and as part of the process of implementation, three committees were organized: Community Life, Mission, and Ongoing Formation. An overview of the role of these three committees was reported.

In addition to the three working committees, three task force groups were appointed for the further study of governance, the election of the General Administration, and regional government and regional meetings.

Sister Stephen Anne Roderiguez then considered the effects of the global pandemic that began in March 2020. Just as our sisters lived through and served in the global pandemic of 1918, our present members, local communities, and ministries faced new challenges. One point of concern had centered on the sisters in Camilla Hall who had to maintain strict protocols. Isolation seriously impacted the sisters there and all of the Congregation in their local settings. Members of the community also experienced an additional sense of loss and disconnect when they were unable to attend the funerals of sisters, family members or friends.

Sister Joanne Ralph continued the report by explaining our response to global consciousness, citing the words of Pope Francis: “Be present among the poor, the marginalized, and those who have no voice.” Inspired by the Chapter 2018 Focus Statement and heeding the pleas of Pope Francis, Sister Joanne continued that the General Administration and the Congregation were deliberate in addressing the epidemic of racism, the plight of migrants, the scourge of poverty, and the crisis of climate change. Concerns about racism led to collaborative opportunities with other congregations, and the formation of new inter-congregational committees ensued.

We continue to engage with the sin of racism by maintaining an active presence on the boards of educational and pastoral institutions that serve racially, socio-economic, and diverse populations – for example, Cristo Rey High School, Gesu School, St. Francis de Sales School, and Mother of Mercy House.

We continue to respond to the issues of immigration by providing direct service to immigrants (The IHM Center for Literacy and GED, The IHM Family Literacy Center, and the Border Project)

We also continue to address poverty by continuing our outreach to Haiti and responding to a need in South Sudan.

Sister Joanne ended her report speaking about the significant crises of climate change and our robust IHM response to *Laudate Si'*, and the themes of the Social Justice Committee for the past 5 years concluded this part of the report.

- 2018 – the Call to Family, Community and Participation with an emphasis on the “common good”
- 2019 – The Dignity of the Human Person
- 2020 – Solidarity: We are one family in one common home
- 2021 – Care for God’s Creation
- 2022 – Option for the Poor and the Vulnerable

These reports were followed by a short period of reflection and sharing at individual tables. The following questions were posed: “What in the presentations this morning resonated with you? What new or revitalized expression of our IHM charism has evolved as we engage the needs of God’s people in our time?” A short break followed the discussions.

Sister Sharon Hedrick continued the delivery of the report by noting our ongoing development as *Consecrated Women of the Church*. In particular, she noted that in 2022, at the invitation of Pope Francis, our sisters entered the synodality process including interacting with members of LCWR and local archdiocesan congregations. Membership with LCWR strengthens collaboration, provides prayer and dialogue opportunities, and participation in efforts to protect the Earth. As General Superior, Sister Mary Ellen Tennity also met with the Core Group of Major Superiors and Archdiocesan Administrators.

Over these past five years, congregationally we were called to undertake new and ongoing educational challenges - including new ministry roles, new places of ministry, as well as new and ongoing publications. The Congregation continued the sharing and living of our IHM hospitality extended to the Sisters of Saint Joseph, Philadelphia and Mombasa, the Lovers of the Holy Cross, the Sisters of Mercy and the Comboni Missionary Sisters, our commitment to vocations and our sisters in formation and the cherishing and celebrating of our IHM Legacy of Grace manifested particularly through the IHM Heritage Room, IHM Vocation Wall, IHM Charism Guide, Fideli Corde Award, and IHM Convocation.

Sister Mary Ellen Tenny completed the report by giving detail regarding our *Congregational Strategic Initiatives*. She stressed that all strategic initiatives center on care of the members and sustaining the mission, and that each strategic initiative was made with prayer, great discernment and intentionality.

The Chapter Report 2018-2023 addressing the complex challenges and decisions regarding Mission, Governance, Leadership, Operations, Technical Capacities, and our IHM Culture was later distributed to each sister.

The morning session ended with Sister Joanne Hanrahan observing and sharing with all those assembled her observation of the faithful witness of our IHM Leadership and the call for the continuation of our deep IHM story.

Sister Catherine Bertrand started the afternoon session with a reminder that this is the last Pre-Chapter gathering before the Chapter of Affairs and of Elections and invited all those gathered to consider two big picture conversations that the Congregation expressed as topics to discuss for future direction. There was a reminder of the critical nature of these conversations as we work together to go deeper, flowing from a discerning nature. These conversations will lead to the fruit of Chapter, and to the development of the “how” we will approach our future as IHM’s.

Sister Joanne Hanrahan focused our attention on the next two big idea conversations, namely, responsible membership and collaboration for mission.

Sister Rosemary DePaul and Sister Mary Virginia Quinn introduced the context for our next big picture conversation: Responsible Membership. A reminder was given about God’s initiative in our call to religious life and the IHM community—where we are called to share our gifts and vulnerabilities living authentically who we are called to be in our sacred encounters.

Attendees were asked to share at their tables regarding two big picture conversations, considering what is the NEW invitation to which we are called?

During the first sharing, we considered:

- 1) As we reflect on our common expression of responsible membership, what does it look like? As individuals and as community?
- 2) How does the deepening of responsible IHM membership impact the whole of our life?

Members at the table were then asked to complete the following: “As a community, we are invited to ...”

A sampling from the attendees included a community invitation to:

- deepen our relationship with Christ through communal prayer and to one another in supportive and positive ways.

- prioritize and prepare for presence and participation at community gatherings at the local and congregational levels.
- create an environment where openness and trust invite us to move out of our comfort zone.
- deepen our relationship with one another by deepening our call to live the vows: poverty (value each other's gifts), chastity (whole-hearted presence to all), and obedience (openness to the spirit within and among).
- be intentional about respecting, accepting, and caring for one another and to see and call forth the best in one another.

All that was shared will be synthesized by the writing team.

After a short break, Sister Catherine Bertrand invited the assembly into dialog regarding the next big picture conversation: Collaboration with and for Mission. She reminded members that the topic of collaboration, although not new, now has an added challenge of naming those critical notions/aspects of making this call operative and effective.

Sister Kathryn Theresa Clemmer introduced this topic by reminding us of our call to share our gifts with the Church and the world through continued collaboration with religious congregations and our lay colleagues. She posed the question, "As the needs of the world change and grow, what new ways does God call us to collaborate?"

Members considered the following:

- 1) What are the beliefs, narratives, and attitudes that foster collaboration with others? Hinder collaboration with others?

Members at the table were then asked to complete the following: "As a community, we are invited to ..."

A sampling from the attendees included a community invitation to:

- collaborate with other congregations to support and enrich the spiritual and social development of our younger members, especially during the period of initial formation.
- recognize that we are a corporation that relies on collaboration with our more experienced lay colleagues which then frees us to live our consecrated lives to the fullest and participate in the mission.
- use the lens of charism and mission, trusting that diversity enriches us and does not divide us.
- let go of fear and acknowledge our vulnerability.
- accept and learn the culture to which we are sent.

Sister Catherine Bertrand reassured the assembly that all the conversations that have been generated are not lost. The writing committee is synthesizing this material and it will include addendum pieces with the proposed Chapter Focus Statement.

Announcements regarding Chapter particulars followed for the delegation.

Sister Mary Ellen Tennity concluded the meeting with an extension of gratitude to several individuals who worked to enhance our time together, and to the sisters for their engaged involvement in our time together.