

## Seeding Our Future III: From Seeds to Bridges

From Friday, July 21 through Monday, July 24, 2017, 34 members of the congregation's "Seeding Our Future" cohort gathered at Carondelet Center in Los Angeles. Our goals were to:

- Deepen our relationships with one another;
- Engage in "Courageous Conversations" about topics that emerged from our zeal and our concerns;
- Communally reflect upon the "Order of the House," particularly in relation to the *Acts of the Extraordinary Congregational Chapter*; and
- Plan and commit to ways to remain in communication and nurture our relationships.

We would like to take this opportunity to share an overview of who we are, what we did during our time together, how it affected us, and who we are becoming, both as a cohort and as sisters within our congregation.

### Who We Are

Our cohort is made up of the 51 members of our congregation who were under age 62 in 2013, our current candidates, and our novice. This was our third "Seeding" gathering, following two previous gatherings in Peru and Albany. We are conscious of those in our cohort who were not able to be with the 34 of us who met in person, but with whom we remain in contact and relationship. We represent rich diversity in cultures, ages, gifts, and experiences. In this respect, we do not speak with a single "voice," but we often feel that the Spirit works among us in ways that bring forth images, values, and actions that we can name and affirm together. One reality that we share is that we anticipate living our charism and mission for many years--and decades--to come. Because of this, our great love for our congregation, and our hopes for the future, we believe that it is essential for us to participate actively in the preparations for and the Congregational Chapter of 2019, itself.

### What We Did

We deepened our relationships through all of our ways of being together during the entire gathering . . . through our prayer, socials, meals, electronic communications, and

many conversations. We practiced ways of being in loving relationship, especially when we do not share the same first language, culture, or perspectives.

During our two full days together (Saturday and Sunday), we shared the State of the Heart and the Order of the House. On Saturday, we engaged in a process of "Courageous Conversations." We generated our own topics and joined small groups to which we were drawn. We were reminded to be "curious" rather than "judgmental" as a way of listening with reverence. Three groups reflected upon and discussed these topics:

- (1) Ongoing formation for the future of religious life and how/where we choose to use our time

Considerations that emerged from this conversation were to seek vitality and joy in whatever we do. We need to be courageous women giving witness to who we are, where we are. We need to remain committed for the sake of those with and for whom we minister. In all that we do into the future, we will need to use technology and engage in mutual support.

- (2) Dream of a new ministry made up of members from every region, providing spiritual development and reaching out to our Dear Neighbor, wherever we are called

This initiative flows from the question, "What invitation or grace does God seem to be extending to us?" We envision a team from a variety of regions going out to the Dear Neighbor to raise deeper spiritual awareness. This mission will be rooted in our living together and sharing our diversity. The team would go where they are invited. The double objective is to be inter-cultural, ourselves, as a way to be a witness to and creatively bring our mission, charism, and spirituality to the world. Our discussion of this idea helped us explore what we are being called to in the *Acts of the Extraordinary Chapter*: "...deepening relationships across the congregation" for "opportunities for personal and communal transformation."

- (3) How would we as a congregation be different if we embraced our internationality and cultural diversity as the lens through which we lived our life together?

The group pondered the question, "How are we being called by God right now?" We desire to recognize and respect each other's cultures. This question was explored at both micro and macro levels.

On the micro level, how do we relate with others? Are we curious and open? We must look at our privileges and prejudices, which can dominate. This demands inner work, but it moves us toward conversations that are honest and difficult; we must make the choice to struggle. We must be attentive to our language and gestures and recognize and address micro-aggressions. We need to change ourselves in order to be truly multicultural. We need to create opportunities to spend time with each other. Full immersion is best, but how can we do that when it is not possible? Suggestions include praying with symbols and art, reading books, and engaging with media that reflect the many cultures of this congregation. Ultimately, this leads to sharing hearts across language barriers. We acknowledged how little we really knew about other cultures, even when we have tried to attend to this. We also acknowledged how hard it is to continue to move outside our comfort zones.

On the macro level, how do we change our systems and structures to reflect the importance and reality of cultural diversity? All voices must be represented around the table. Our internationality is central to and must inform our current conversations and decisions about our governance structures. This awareness can broaden our thinking in ways that can bring new ideas into this dialogue. We are called to live with mutual confidence in one another. Throughout our history, we have overcome political and social conflicts through the charism that we have incarnated.

On Sunday, we prayed with, reflected upon, and discussed the *Acts of the Extraordinary Congregational Chapter*. We experienced energy around these insights:

The Chapter invites us all to deepen our relationships and to engage together as Sisters of St. Joseph, feeling our woundedness, but choosing Communion. As our cohort grows in our ability to listen to, learn with, and trust one another, we are living into what we are also called to do as a congregation. We do not do this alone. We are like geese in flight, accompanying each other, always moving toward the Dear Neighbor, the needs of our time, and the needs of the future. This is also a time for personal transformation, especially in honoring our diversity and embracing inclusivity. We need to speak up, ourselves, and communicate our experiences, wisdom, hopes, and desires to the larger congregation. We believe in a God of abundance. We have many gifts, and we need to use them for mission.

After listening to one another's hopes and dreams, we feel renewed optimism for the future. We trust in and commit ourselves to the work of the Innovations and Animation Committees to help us as we continue to discern. Above all, we trust in the work of the Spirit among us all.

## How It Affected Us: Who We Are Becoming

Many of us felt that each time we gather, we grow as a group. We increasingly trust in one another's goodness. We also recognize that it is important for us to articulate our own identity as a group, initiate concrete ways to get to know one another more deeply, and continue our mission of unifying love. We also suggest that our most meaningful "report" for the congregation is not just a document but also a description of the ways that we are living into the future together.

In this light, the name and image of "seeds" no longer expresses who we are. We embraced the new name and image of "Kakehashi" (Japanese for "bridge") to reflect this emerging sense of who we are together, within the congregation, and for the world . . . "a bridge for the future," which truly reflects our diversity and internationality in all we do.

We affirmed the importance of meeting every two years—but preferably as soon as 2018, before the 2019 Congregational Chapter. Many are choosing to continue participating in small group Zoom gatherings. We also have access to our own Google Group to enable further electronic communications among us.

Our closing prayer was a "gathering of the graces." We expressed profound gratitude to our leadership, to all who have supported us as a cohort, and to the great communal work of the past and forthcoming Chapters. Finally, we commit to staying in relationship with one another and working through differences and difficulties when they arise. We will continue to engage in congregational conversations and processes as we strive to live the unity and active inclusive love to which we are called as Sisters of St. Joseph.