



## CONGREGATIONAL LEADERSHIP TEAM REPORT ON THE FIRST YEAR OF OUR MINISTRY

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As we come to the end of our first year in office, we want to share with you our journey so far. Just two months into our term we had to step back and adjust to the new COVID reality. This report provides an overview of our year.

- **Communications.** We “spoke” with you through open houses, weekly COVID updates, letters, videos, a survey, *We Are Carondelet* and *For the Life of the World*. With the help of JPIC (Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation) and others we have written advocacy pieces to legislators and policy makers.
- **Team development.** We worked with a facilitator to help create a well-functioning team.
- **Chapter directions.** As called by the 2019 Chapter, we have focused much of our energy on these directions. The full report goes into detail on each of these.
- **Intra-congregational gatherings.** COVID forced us all to learn how to communicate electronically, which helped us gather across vice/provincial boundaries.
- **Focus areas.** Topics such as racism, migration and human trafficking suggested by LCWR (The Leadership Conference of Women Religious), the Federation (U.S. Federation of Sisters of St. Joseph) and the signs of the times also demand our attention.
- **Liaison responsibilities.** We serve as liaisons to a variety of groups.
- **Ordinary functioning.** We also oversee the ordinary tasks of running an organization.
- **Staff support.** We would not function at all without the support of our extraordinary staff.

### INTRODUCTION: A CHANGE OF PLANS

In December 2019, we met with the outgoing CLT for an in-depth orientation and stayed on for a few days to begin our own planning. When we came together on January 13, 2020 to start our new

ministry, we hit the ground running. Through a series of frequent meetings, we outlined our goals, set up future gatherings, planned our travel schedule and worked with a consultant on team building. We were “pumped” and ready. We were literally traveling by car about halfway to our first listening session with the St. Paul Province in mid-March when everything shut down for the virus. Like all of you, we had to step back and adjust to a new reality. We quickly learned the graces of Zoom and moved forward. Let us provide our accountability for the year.

## **COMMUNICATIONS**

Our communications have taken two forms, internal communications among our sisters and ACOF and advocacy with individuals and organizations outside of us.

In terms of internal communications, we have hosted several Zoom “open houses,” providing a number of sessions over a weekend in the hopes that everyone would have a chance to participate. Some of these sessions had a specific theme, others were more open-ended conversations. We were pleased with the number of you who gathered with us and glad that people had a chance to get to know or get reacquainted with others across the congregation. We enjoyed the depth of the conversation among us. In addition, we initiated the weekly COVID updates and the weekly poetry to respond to this time in which we find ourselves. We surveyed you about your hopes for implementing the chapter directions. We also wrote some letters to you on specific topics and provided video presentations, a few of which were amusing. We provided bi-monthly updates in the *We Are Carondelet* newsletter and initiated *For the Life of the World* as a monthly invitation to reflect on our chapter directives

In advocacy, we have chosen those topics on which we have “credibility” and have always paired our letters and statements with some action that we can take. LCWR, the Federation and our own JPIC group help us with these statements and letters. This year we have taken stands against the death penalty, single-use plastics and racism, have worked for criminal justice reform and supported church leaders who raise up the gifts of women.

## **TEAM DEVELOPMENT**

In spite of our need to meet electronically, we have worked with a wonderful facilitator, Karen Vernal, to create a well-functioning team among us. Over three multi-day sessions, Karen has helped us develop skills, alerted us to potential pitfalls and helped us formulate goals and strategies for our success. On a larger scale, we all attended the LCWR Assembly and the Federation Leadership Assembly. We participate in a monthly local LCWR meeting and the Regional LCWR gatherings. The

CLT has read two books in common. *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* by Rev. Bryan Massingale and *Women: Icons of Christ* by Phyllis Zagano.

This year, with almost no travel, has afforded us the opportunity to participate in a number of webinars on such topics as racism, restorative justice and climate change. Among the most beneficial of these was an eight-session course on interculturality. We try to disseminate our learnings from these growth opportunities to the wider congregation through our regular publications and special letters. Since we were all “at home,” we were able to have frequent CLT meetings together (electronically) which has fostered our productivity and our team development.

## **CHAPTER DIRECTIONS**

Our team mission is: *We will engage people in the energy of the 2019 Chapter.* Thus, a large measure of our work has centered there. In April 2020, rich data from a survey we circulated among you about the chapter directions helped us in our planning for implementation. As we work to animate each of the chapter directives, we have also sought to include the chapter’s call to “continue to provide opportunities for intra-congregational dialogue and sharing.” Let us look at each chapter direction in turn and name the highlights.

### **Respond to the crisis of Earth and global warming**

To respond to the crisis of Earth, we have educated and asked for action. Two major events highlighted this effort, *Laudato Si’* Week and the Season of Creation. We celebrated the five-year anniversary of *Laudato Si’* with an intense weeklong series of presentations and actions in April 2020. The *Laudato Si’* programs, three of which were offered in three languages, attracted 1,019 people. Major emphasis was placed on educating ourselves about *Laudato Si’* and the scourge of single-use plastics. Prayers and actions were offered for individual and communal use.

With the U.S. Federation of Sisters of St. Joseph, we provided five weeks of programming for the Season of Creation in September and October 2020. Again, these seminars focused on our efforts to stop the production of and waste created by single-use plastics. We were pleased that so many people participated in the various activities offered for the Season of Creation. Our various videos achieved 1,269 views and over 400 people joined our opening and closing prayers. Highlights of the Season of Creation included a talk on ecological conversion, a prayer journal to assist in deepening the conversion experience, multiple presentations in three languages (English, Japanese and Spanish) and social justice actions to reduce single-use plastics. We created a catalogue of plastic-free products, which will remain on our website and which we will continue to expand.

## **Deepen awareness of our complicity and work toward dismantling interlocking systems of oppression**

Our first step toward dismantling interlocking systems of oppression is recognizing our own participation in these systems. In that effort, we have initiated a number of educational experiences. We started the monthly newsletter, *For the Life of the World*, which invites us to reflect on different aspects of systems of oppression. In this we not only seek to provide information, but to change hearts. With each issue, we encourage feedback to continue the conversation.

The work of our provincial JPIC teams and our sisters throughout the congregation complements our work as the CLT. They help to deepen our understanding of systems of oppression through reading, webinars, keeping updated on current events and, when possible, putting their knowledge into action by advocacy. They offer expertise and service to groups and organizations that work to dismantle these oppressive structures. We are also participating in planning by Region X of LCWR to present a series of livestreamed panels conversations that explore the intersection of racism, migration and climate change in the United States and beyond. We provided background resources and encouraged as many people as possible to meet with their legislators to urge them to enact changes in the criminal justice system. The CLT is committed to connecting with national and international organizations of religious and others of goodwill who are working for change.

## **Articulate and authentically live our vows in ways that witness and speak to today's realities**

Our initial effort in this area is to highlight aspects of our spirituality. In pursuit of that goal, we have invited the entire congregation and ACOF to participate in online Sharing of the Heart/Order of the House groups across the congregation. With the help of various sisters from the congregation and the Federation we produced two videos to give everyone a common understanding of the process. We have also developed written materials to assist us in this effort. A committee representing each vice/province is working on the project and about 35 conveners will help lead the initial small groups during Lent 2021. In response to social upheaval and especially the violence of January 6, 2021 in the U.S. Capitol, we developed a novena to pray for solidarity, peace and justice in the spirit of our charism. We invited sisters, ACOF and other friends to join in the novena and received a broad response.

## **Walk with women as we claim our voice and work toward an inclusive church and society**

In this area, we have provided a well-received, three-part online series presenting the work of young women theologians, entitled "Theological Insights." Each of the women we have highlighted so far had previously been a St. Joseph Worker. A total of 822 individuals and groups registered for these three webinars. The success of the first series spurred us to plan another series in 2021. We have also

encouraged women-led liturgies, and modeled this both at our installation ceremony and at the two Congregational Leadership Group meetings. As indicated above, the CLT read and discussed the book *Women: Icons of Christ* by Phyllis Zagano, which traces the history of ministry by women, especially those ordained as deacons. The first panel discussion of the Region X of LCWR series described above will explore specifically how women fare in the interlocking systems of racism, migration and climate change.

### **Use our collective voice to accompany others in speaking their truth.**

We have used our collective voice for advocacy related to our chapter directions calling us to work to relieve Earth, to address systems of oppression and to accompany women in church and society as well as some additional areas which we will discuss below. As indicated above, we try not to write or sign onto letters and statements unless we are also willing to back up our voices with some action. In each case, we have shared the letters and statements with the entire congregation including ACOF, and we have often invited our partners in ministry into action as well. Others are more influenced by those who experience oppression than they are when others speak for them. To address this, we are creating an online curriculum to assist social service agencies to prepare their clients to speak before local, state and national groups. It is a small step from there to advocacy and lobbying.

### **INTRA-CONGREGATIONAL GATHERINGS**

Responding to the 2019 Chapter decision to continue providing opportunities for sharing and dialog among the sisters and ACOF, we assembled a group to work on what these gatherings could be. The fruits of this committee are:

- Sharing of the Heart/Order of the House groups described above, which will begin gathering during Lent 2021. As much as possible, each group of five will have a diversity of sisters and ACOF who come from across the congregation.
- In the "Theological Insights" series described above, the presenters came from the St. Joseph Worker program and ACOF. Since the online programming allowed for interpretation, all of us, including Japanese and Spanish speakers, could join in these opportunities.
- As mentioned above, the CLT also hosted three weekends of open-ended Zoom calls across the congregation which included Spanish translation.
- In the chapter directions survey, a number of people wrote of their hope for study-type gatherings. Thus, in collaboration with Wisdom Ways Spirituality Center, a St. Paul ministry, we are offering a study of Mark's Gospel, available without cost to sisters and ACOF.

## **FOCUS AREAS**

While we recognize that we cannot do all things, in addition to our chapter directions, we have also identified some “focus areas” that come from LCWR, the Federation, from the signs of the times and from long-standing commitments. In these focus areas, we pay particular attention to when it might be appropriate to write a letter or statement, advocate with our state and national legislators or take other action. These areas include restorative justice, racism, migration and human trafficking. From time to time over the year, we have encouraged you to take action in some of these areas.

## **LIAISON RESPONSIBILITIES**

**ACOF.** Our Associates, Consociates, ‘Ohana and Familia de San José were unable to gather for their convocation in June 2020 in St. Paul, but that did not stop them. In the ensuing months, they have offered the presentations prepared for the convocation to a much larger audience of sisters and ACOF through Zoom. The directors hold monthly virtual meetings to coordinate these presentations and look forward to sharing more deeply at their extended April 2021 meeting.

**Agrégée companions.** The agrégée companions and sisters who are walking with them held their yearly retreat virtually in June 2020. The group, along with their CLT liaisons, meets virtually every two months for updating among themselves, to develop the goals that were set during that retreat and to flesh out the principles of their founding document. In addition, they are putting the finishing touches on a video where they share their vocation stories.

**Formation.** Since we have experienced two and a half years of the Congregational Novitiate, a group undertook an overall evaluation of the program. Novice directors, novices and others who worked with them participated in the survey, which was collated and summarized. This information will be used to determine recommendations that will come to the CLG in February 2021. A group also worked on finalizing the updates in the Congregational Formation Plan.

**Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation.** JPIC has had a busy year developing programs and creating advocacy plans. Since a number of new members have joined the group this year, an annual retreat in October 2020 helped to deepen community among the members and focused their plans for the upcoming year.

**Retirement.** The retirement group had to delay their biannual gathering until September 2021. In the absence of that group, the leaders in this area have met bimonthly to offer support to one another and share ideas in these trying times.

**Vocations.** A number of new members joined the vocations group this year. They have worked to update the vocation page on the congregational website, establish a common theme for vocation materials and consider ways to move forward together.

## **ORDINARY FUNCTIONING**

In addition to the areas mentioned above, the ordinary day-to-day functioning must go forward. Each of us serves as a liaison to working groups and other committees. In addition to the working groups sited above, we also have communications, development/advancement, finances, formation and information technology. These groups function differently with some meeting monthly and working closely together and others meeting less frequently and more informally. Other ongoing liaison responsibilities include the mission office, Kakehashi, St. Joseph Workers, The Association of Colleges of Sisters of St. Joseph and Ascension Health.

Committees also met this year. The Intra-Congregational Gatherings Committee met to focus on ways that we might bring sisters and ACOF from various parts of the congregation together online and hopefully in the near future in-person as well. The Ad Hoc Finance Committee and the Resource Committee begun by the previous CLT completed their work. Others also assisted with the planned roll out of Sharing of the Heart/Order of the House. Committees helped with the planning and implementation of the *Laudato Si'* Week celebration and the Season of Creation.

In spite of COVID, we have had opportunities to meet with the vice/provinces with which we liaise. We gathered with the sisters at virtual assemblies, prayer services and webinars. We spent some time with our given leadership teams at the Congregational Leadership Group meeting and have consulted with them from time to time as well.

Last May, our longtime executive assistant, Pam Harding, retired. While we recognized the loss of her expertise, we also saw this as an opportunity to assess the skills we needed now and create the role of project coordinator. This position has three dimensions: assistance with software learning and implementation, help with data collection and dissemination and support for congregational communications. We were fortunate to hire Lauren Clancy, who enjoys engaging in all of these tasks.

We also have the usual responsibilities of chairing team meetings, writing reports, supervising staff and the other general responsibilities of administration.

## STAFF

Of course, we would be unable to do any of this work without the skills, expertise and assistance of our dedicated and amazingly productive staff.

- Without **Executive Secretary Barbara Siderewicz, OSF** the whole office might fly apart. Her efficiency and effectiveness, even in the face of all the disruptions of COVID-19, kept us on track in this first year of our term. Her ease in handling the diverse questions and issues that arise when she picks up the phone and her ability to multitask and still keep smiling are great gifts to us. Barbara's fine minutes provide not only an immediate reference, they create our history as well. Barbara oversaw Zoom in this strange year and provided for all of our needed translation and interpretation.
- We have demanded so much of **Congregational Communications Director Kim Westerman** this year and, somehow, she kept up with all of it. COVID again made additional demands in communications, requiring a weekly COVID update and the decision to provide a weekly poem to keep beauty in our lives during this unique time. We also added *For the Life of the World* to our publications. This is in addition to the usual tasks such as the annual magazine, bi-weekly issues of *We Are Carondelet*, website updates, social media posts and advocacy letters. Kim organizes monthly meetings with province communication directors, gathers with professional communication groups and this year worked on the LCWR regional panels described above.
- Since **Project Coordinator Lauren Clancy** came on board in July, she has added an important expertise to our office, helping us to acclimate to Microsoft SharePoint, *Teams* and a variety of other software for online collaboration. It gives us a certain security with "things electronic" to know that Lauren is at the other end of the phone line.
- **Director of the Carondelet Consolidated Archive Catherine Lucy** continues to provide excellent archival services for our consolidated archives. Those in the province archives have found her easy to work with. Again, COVID disrupted the usual work of researchers who come to the office, but Catherine helped them as much as possible through electronic means and took the extra time to move forward on some long-term projects.
- **Congregational Archivist Carol Marie Wildt, SSND** goes about her archives work with sure knowledge and proficiency. We know that she will competently sort what needs to be saved and what we only need for immediate use.
- **Assistant Mission Coordinator Eleanor Ortega** oversees the Mission Office with compassion and great administrative skill. COVID totally disrupted her usual mission efforts this year, but she rose to the occasion with aplomb. She receives, tracks and writes thank you notes for donations, coordinates the mission appeals in dioceses and keeps up-dated with the U.S. Mission Conference.

- **Bookkeeper Tom Ratz** continues to provide efficient and exact financial knowhow. His reports are clear and appropriately brief. No question is too small or unimportant.

## **CONCLUSION**

What would have been an adjustment year turned into an ADJUSTMENT year. It seemed at every turn we had to discover new ways to accomplish our tasks. Among the challenges of COVID was the inability to visit people face-to-face and to gather with other leaders at Federation and LCWR meetings. Among the graces of this time, we had more opportunities for extended conversation and reflection than would likely have been possible if we were more often “on the road.” While electronic means have supported our efforts to accomplish tasks, determining ways to provide for the informal interactions that help to create the “glue” in a group has been more challenging. The whole world is working on that question. Mostly we leave this year privileged to have this opportunity to serve the congregation, pleased with what we have been able to accomplish and looking forward to yet another adjustment as the restrictions of COVID ease.