

Sisters and Consociates Envision a New Community Assembly

By Linda Taylor, CSJ

On January 10, 2015, approximately 163 persons: 114 Sisters, 46 Consociates and 3 Candidates gathered to inaugurate the first Community Assembly of the St. Paul Province. The day's process began with a ritual of participants walking under a festive archway or "threshold". This symbolized moving from earlier paradigms or models of being the CSJ Community of St. Paul toward a new paradigm of more inclusion and connection with other persons and groups who share the CSJ charism and are committed to the CSJ Mission.

To varying degrees, most of the participants had an understanding that their task was to create something new. Many hoped the new assembly would help participants grow in a deeper understanding and living of the 2013 Acts of Chapter. They anticipated it might develop ways for Sisters and Consociates to work together and partner with others to address issues of justice. Some who came to the assembly were excited about doing something new, having glimmers of what that might be. Others came with hesitations and concerns about what that might be. It was the usual mix of dreamers and thinkers joining together, sharing their visions, trying to understand each other, and working toward a consensus that would guide and energize the group into the future.

To begin the day, Consociate Janet Williams sang the "Prologue" to "Born of Dreams", calling all to remember the CSJ legacy of courage and daring in loving God and neighbors. Later, Justice Commission Members Joan Wittman, Mary Ann Brenden (Consociates), and Susan Jasko, CSJ(A) led a Legislative Advocacy Partners (LAP) presentation on the challenges and injustices of the US immigration system. These issues became real as a resident of Sarah's shared her personal experience of immigration from Africa to America. The presentation ended with information on how LAP works to address injustices and an invitation to join LAP.

As the day continued, participants began developing scenarios for the new Assembly by: 1) talking about what matters to them, and 2) identifying persons and groups who might want to join them in carrying the CSJ mission into the future. Themes that emerged included:

- Widen our circles, welcoming and including a diversity of others who gather around our mission and charism especially marginalized people;
- Build networking and collaboration among those who share our mission and charism;
- Include those who have a deeper connection with the CSJ community, mission and ministry at some of the Assembly meetings, when appropriate.

With this first meeting, the province began to explore possibilities for creating a new Community Assembly. All those who engaged in the process realized it would take a while to complete. The next Community Assembly is on Saturday, May 9th. All sisters and consociates are invited to be a part of the process as it continues to move forward.