

## **Community Assembly:**

### **Who are we now? What can we do together?**

By Andrea Pearson Tande, Linda Taylor, CSJ and Jill Underdahl, CSJ

On Wednesday, October 24, 2018 the newly-expanded Community Assembly met for the first time. As the meeting began, Consociate Rita Quigley and Jill Underdahl, CSJ, welcomed the “new body” consisting of Sisters, Consociates, Consociate Candidates, Friends of St. Joseph, St. Joseph Workers, St. Joseph Worker Community, Commissions, and Partners in Ministry/Mission.\* To welcome everyone Rita invited us to sing, “Consider yourself at home!” “Consider yourself part of the family!”

Business at the meeting included reviewing: 1) “Summaries of CA Commission Activities (Justice, Ministry, Relationships and Associations and the Acts of Chapter Committee), and 2) the new “Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) drafted by the Community Assembly Planning Committee (CAPC). Discussion focused primarily on the makeup of the CA Planning Committee, e.g. “How can this committee better reflect the CA’s new expanded participation?” “How can we ensure that people from all groups are represented?”

Table talk helped participants become better acquainted. Topics for conversation included: “What matters most to you, and what do you want to do around that?” “How can being part of the community help you enrich that passion and learn more about yourself and your mission?”

In light of our charism’s call to unifying love, participants viewed a TED talk from Joanna Kerr entitled, “How Can Compassion Transform Activism?” Kerr reflected on how compassion and connection with all living beings saved her health, transformed her work in activism and social change, and led to deep change in herself. To view go to: <https://youtu.be/dCNC821-hic>

Cathy Steffens then spoke about compassion in relation to the LCWR Doctrinal Assessment. From the recently published book honoring the sacredness of this journey: *However Long the Night: Making Meaning in a Time of Crisis*. Cathy shared how LCWR leadership and the bishops listened and worked together across differing viewpoints for the common good. Sisters involved in this Visitation experience made a conscious decision not to see the bishops in the investigation as adversarial. Many supporters wanted them to speak out against the visitation—but LCWR insisted that they would not. The assessment ended with a statement of praise from the Vatican. Approaching one another with compassion and prayer transformed the adversarial situation into one of mutual respect.

Individuals shared their own experiences with difficult conversations and compassion in small groups. Together we wondered: How can these messages help us move forward with what we desire to be as a community? In large group we then shared some insights and ideas for future assemblies. Following is a sampling of what folks shared:

- Could we raise our voice together on behalf of immigrants who are in crisis?

- Even within community or family, how do you have compassionate dialogue with people you disagree with very strongly?
- Anger is a necessary part of work for justice. How does it work with our charism? How does it work with compassion?
- Compassion is a decision.
- Compassion and deep listening are interrelated and part of the CSJ Mission.
- Compassion for the earth- taking personal action. Using our congregational power more effectively to address polluting industry in conjunction with other voices

In closing, Kathleen Olsen and the St. Joseph Workers led the group in songs inspired by a Buddhist prayer for peace and a South African Zulu traditional: “Come with Me for the Journey Is Long”

The collection was for relief for people affected by hurricanes “Florence” and “Michael”.

\* Participants (131) included: 72 Sisters, 40 Consociates, 7 Consociate Candidates, 1 Friends of St. Joseph, 3 St. Joseph Workers, 2 St. Joseph Worker Community members, and 6 Partners in Mission/Ministry who serve on Commissions.