

## COLLATED RESPONSES FROM YOUR SPRING 2018 LEAVEN GROUPS

Note: Responses are lettered, not numbered. There might be more responses than groups because responses from the Leaven Light are included in the listings.

### **What do you want the Governance Committee and the Council to hear from your discussion of the Responses from the fall 2017 Leaven Groups?**

A. We noted especially four different areas that stood out for us: i) Many comments around those “who will come after us and the discernment that is needed for them; i.e., skills for the future, emphasis on quality over quantity, will they “fit.” ii) We continue to have small conversations when we should have larger ones. Many topics mentioned are more local issues and not community issues. iii) There seem to be varying perceptions about the boundaries of legitimate authority and the collaborative model that we are moving into. iv) Some addressed a resistance to conversations that address our properties vs. our people at this stage (home is precious!).

B.\*Religious life as we know it, is in demise.

\*We need a deeper relationship and identity with the Charity Federation, the Vincentian Family and SCLAs. Continued collaboration with entities such as Network, the works of Catholic Charities and the civic community is needed and critical to our re-founding.

\*We must think broader and beyond “SCL;” work in partnership and “yield our pride of place.” (O’Murchu) Let’s appreciate that in our diminishment, we cannot tackle systemic change on our own, but can contribute our part as a member community of the Charity Federation.

\*We encourage all SCLs who are able to attend the 2019 all-members Charity Federation in Chicago to be better informed about the Who, What and How this group functions, what is being done at this level, etc.

\*We need a shift from the traditional notion of vocations. Our reality is we do not have vocations as in women choosing to live the vowed life. We need to expand and diversify our idea of vocation; expand the range, think in a much broader sense, to include others, such as former students, former SCLs, those with whom we work; include these under the umbrella of “vocations” as many of these live lives of service.

\*We need to have a more flexible agenda at our Leaven Groups and our Leaven Assembly meetings. For example, use the Leaven Assembly for discussion, yes, but make it operational, i.e., create a definite plan for going forward that all can embrace and implement steps toward making that plan a reality.

\*We need communal planning for assessing our community properties, our sponsored ministries, assessing and distributing our financial assets. \*

\*We need to face our fears, our denials, our loss of control, our loss of SCL identity that is linked to traditional ministries; this calls for grieving our losses, recognizing, naming, and ritualizing what is passing and embrace our present reality. This will enable us to move on, and anticipate the future positively and with hope.

C. What is taking place? Responses show that we are willing to expand our circles, illustrated in comments about the Vincentian Family, positive opinions of Associates, greater conversation with others, collaboration with other communities, sharing of resources such as property.

Bold steps? Working together as we are in Leaven Groups leads to bold steps.

We need young associates. Consider working with the college or a college house for this. Grow community life, more per house as possible. Maybe have some houses with Associates living with us. Maybe mixed membership (vowed, lay). Continue conversations around community and younger members.

Build permeable walls between those in or out of community, in Catholic church or beyond. Call people together as does Welcome Central, Seton Center.

Offer less of the busy, more of fun and joy. Our gift as we grow older is presence; pass on leadership to others. Presence to young who protest school shootings. Welcome to immigrants. Support to Dreamers.

Resistance? Respect where people are.

Significant in article? Necessity to accept and grieve losses. Pendulum swings – embrace seedlings of hope. Let the Spirit work. Liminal – on the threshold – is where we are. Have we ritualized grief enough to reappropriate charism and become a learning community. Ministries of the past are no longer as applicable; new needs call us. There is no new life without dying. Ritualize losses – a conscious letting go, not just forgetting.

D. We have moved from ministry in education and hospitals to more individual efforts to minister to current needs of our day, the poor, homeless, immigrants, enslaved in trafficking, and the environment. We are dealing emotionally with transitional phases connected with our diminishment in number, aging, and physical limitations. We need to recognize, accept, and prepare ourselves for these and future realities.

Identify and make the most of the connections we already have to further the Vincentian charism. (i.e. USM, Christo Rey, SCLA's, our employees, etc.)

E. Continue deeper conversations about where we are going and who we want to be. Name what we let go of and then ritualize and celebrate what we let go of with the goal of moving beyond.

Name and face our resistances.

Collaborate with, accompany leaders outside the community who are addressing needs of the suffering in the same Vincentian spirit.

F. This group recognized the thread of COLLABORATION in the responses of the fall 2017 Leaven groups/the ongoing engagement of our Sisters with the Mission and identified critical issues based on the reality of our demographics/a noted deepening of the Vincentian charism. This group recognized an emerging honesty regarding the reality of our community demographics and openness to diverse perspectives of our life in community and ministry.

This group recommends to the planning committee for the Assembly in July a dialogue to be held among our younger women (SCLs 60 years old and younger) in order for the broader community to hear their voices: how they see the future/where they would like the community to go/their experience with the Charity Federation members or members of Giving Voice/how Peruvian Hermanas de Caridad have collaborated with other religious in Peru.

Possible format suggestions:

- Use of the fish bowl technique (Participants in center circle/other Sisters listening only seated around the circle)
- Responding to prepared open-ended and creative questions
- Invite Sister Amy Willcott to facilitate her peers

G. We need a Ritual of Mourning, which is evident in the comments from the fall gatherings. There are assumptions, frustrations, and a difficulty in letting go of old mind-sets. If we are living the Paschal Mystery, we recognize that there is no new life without dying...and we cannot grieve alone! We suggest this could happen sometime during our gathering this summer.

We propose that ,as part of this summer's assembly, there be small group sharing, (4 in a group, movement to new groups every half hour or so) of sisters varying in age, geography, experiences, living alone, different ministries, etc...to converse about what is going on in our lives...to assist us in moving forward. It appears there are many assumptions regarding: living at the Mother House and/or issues there; living alone or in groups of two; unawareness of what ministries sisters are involved in(especially with so many of us "actively retired").

H. Acknowledge that we are in the process of dying and decline and have the need for the entire community to ritualize our grieving and our losses.

Do not spend our time focusing on vocations, fretting and feeling guilty because we do not have vocations. Focus on the deeper question, "are we living our mission" and be open to where God is leading us. Broaden our thinking beyond just SCL's regarding vocations and formation

I. We want to thank the Governance Committee and Council for sharing the full list of Responses. We feel an increased sense of participation in the process.

As we examined the Responses, we noted a difference between "internal" and "external" issues. Internal issues are such things as: what to do with properties, terms of office, community lifestyle, concern with numbers (vocations). Could these internal issues be researched and addressed better by committee members (task force, whatever) and reported back at a summer assembly?

We see External issues as how we are addressing the critical needs of our time. This would involve collaboration with others, etc., those issues that reach beyond our internal organization.

In examining the Responses, much discussion took place around "letting go" of the past in order to be open to the new. Recognizing the good we have done through past ministries and sponsored works, would ritualizing and celebrating the past benefit us in letting go?

J. It seems we are being called to form expanded forms of community and to reconsider what community means for us (ways of being and doing)

We are being called to greater collaboration with other groups and to consider what new ministries are attracting us.

Openness to the new and willingness to leave the past as we move to the new.

Even as we continue to pray concerning directions that we also seek ways to share our resources as well examine our lifestyles and pay attention to the most vulnerable and the critical needs that arise.

It is becoming more important to allow our Associates to be a more integral part of our community--sharing in our works, sharing with us in our Leaven meetings and decisions.

In our work with the poor, ask them what they really need - involve them in the planning process for them.

K. In addressing our local and global concerns, utilize methods and suggestions of specific social, civic and religious groups for beginning collaboration with the wider world initiatives.

Planning the expanded use of the Mother House, the surrounding grounds and facilities for those whose needs may dictate our sharing.

Re-visioning the total vocation formation thrust, deeply aware of our present day reality. (They will be the community when we are long gone.)

Recognizing that the SCL Associates are a great asset to our community, let us continue to use their talents/skills as fully as possible.

Continuing to develop the process of contemplative dialog and prayer in living, sharing and making decisions.

L. Focus on changing the resistance to change—mourn the loss, but don't be afraid. Look seriously now at length of terms of Community Director and Council, joining another community, etc.

Decide on 1-3 things that we want to focus on as a community e.g. violence, immigration, environment, NRA. Choose 2-3 and move on them. The council takes the lead with input from the whole. Plan and then we each play our role as we can. Limit the number of things we try to work on at one time. Decide on things and move.

Who are our prophets in our community and are we listening to them?

Collaborate with others—associates, churches, Federation, Vincentian Family, churches, etc. Start the conversations now.

M. First of all, we would like to know if they are interested in and have taken into account our contributions and responses of 2017 from the Leaven Group in Peru.

How have our contributions from the reality in Latin America been received?

N. We wish to continue our education, including speakers, reading materials, etc., and advocacy for the many critical issues facing us today, especially in regards to immigration and supporting families in their many needs, as well as practical ways for sustainability and care of creation.

We wish to continue our networking and collaboration with our Associates, our Charity Federation, the Vincentian Family, our employees, and any other groups to best support and assist with our presence, expertise, advocacy, and resources with the immediate and long-term needs of those most in need as we are able both locally (ex. Leavenworth Interfaith Community of Hope), regionally, and globally.

In light of vocations and Initial Formation, we wish to be welcoming communities of hospitality and vitality for one another, for our newer members, and for our guests through our sharing of quality presence, prayer, and ministries.

O. Continue to refine the circular model of the governance process.

To that end, grapple with a real question/issue that requires communal discernment, such as, use of our land and resources.

Ritualize the grief process we are experiencing as a community as we are letting go of our past and moving into an unknown future.

P. Please encourage people, or provide more structured opportunities, to have more conversations about these things.

We need to do more to ritualize our losses, especially for those who were not present at the local ceremony. We talked about:

- Loss of SCLs in the schools
- Loss of people in Montana
- Loss of new members
- Loss of our traditional ministries

Perhaps do a piece on how to grieve.

- Make a decision about welcoming new membership

Q. Overwhelmed by the comments about inviting people to enter the community. Just the number of questions about this. It's good that people are beginning to talk about this.

We need to do something as a community to move forward rather than looking in the rear-view mirror. We need to ask hard questions. We are fearful of the unknown, of considering some outlandish things.

Comments were all over the spectrum. Important to understand that some comments might come from one or a few people and some might represent a group. Important that we stay open. It's encouraging that we are talking to each other. Leadership is looking around and aware of situations, does not have a "head in the sand" attitude.

The future is intergenerational. The article pointed out the challenges.

Great desire to have a conversation about important things without the need to make decisions; just "be" with the questions. Reflecting at a recent wake/funeral that we have had a lot of losses and that there are more to come. Don't want to have "willful blindness," we need to have a way to name and ritualize the grief of our losses, get more in tune with the Good Friday experience. Noticed a difference between the open system and closed system.

Comments were weighty and called us to a greater awareness of the dying process. Need to have a greater readiness to embrace the power of loss; difference in health care between "Don't give up," "Where there's life there's hope," sometimes intervention is not necessary.

Real presence of the Spirit. It is time for some action, but perhaps we are still in the Advent or Lent time of preparation.

At times the challenges of day-to-day takes up all the energy, hard to focus and think about the topics discussed in our Leaven meetings.

Comments were on different levels, some are more surface and some are deeper. Mention of Vincentian charism – how do we open our selves to other groups that share this. How do we keep the conversations going, to keep it in mind between meetings.

What needs out immediate attention going forward? What bold steps might we choose to get there?

Reflected on the example of the pioneer sisters –how Mother Xavier got them all on board to do some of the things they did. The majority of the SCLs need to follow this and move forward to the unknown.

We need a unified response to whatever it is we do. Should we include the SCLAs? Do we need to look at merging. Some of Mother Xavier's sisters went back to Nazareth. Look seriously at the invitation to enter

Mother Xavier saw a need and she responded. People joined their community to address that need. A need to look at the questions and not the answers. The way we respond attracts others to join us in the Vincentian charism. So many young people at the 400th celebration in Rome. How can we inspire more of that?

Focus on the topics of Catholic Social Teaching for discussion – take “baby” bold steps. Create groups to study and work on topics.

Have conversations in a structured way. It’s easier to DO things; is it important to do something else? What kind of good do we want to do? Identify that and then start talking about the question.

What resistances might we face? Any suggestions for moving beyond them?

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith , USCCB, People we taught, family members, parishioners, sometimes SCLs

Be centered, rely on God, pray, interact with a variety of people. Be aware of the Spirit

Change is hard. Age is a factor. Complacent attitude. Too many people are content to be on the side lines. Fear of the unknown. Fear that we might not be doing it right. Post Vatican II. Prayer, reading discussion

We resist looking at death and letting go. Resistance to SCL Associates. Resist sharing our MH space with students, for example. How do we have structured discussions about problems? Ritualize death and loss. Seeds within us for eternal life. Let them grow.

Fear. Vision of a bridge with the planks behind us slowly disappearing, and we can’t see very far ahead. Don’t abandon the journey; occasions will arise on the journey and we have to be open to them.

Fear of moving forward without a plan

Fear. Great love and affection for each other. Need a guide about what we are supposed to do. Have serious conversations and do it soon.

SPIRALING FORWARD: LOOKING TO OUR FUTURE

Discussion of Chapter 12, “Re-founding is Possible”

What is significant in this article about Religious Life today?

- Dying and rising
- Embracing integrated spirituality
- Possibility of re-founding
- evolutionary dying, learning “21st Century skills”
- the shift from a caterpillar to a butterfly – becomes completely different yet still the same “stuff”.

Collaboration, ritualizing death, contemplative spirit

- the significance of the article has yet to be seen. How does it affect s? Maybe we'll never understand

R. We want the Governance Committee and the Council to know that we are ready to ask, discuss, and answer the following questions: 1. We want the Governance Committee and the Council to know that we are ready to ask, discuss, and answer the following questions:

a. Do we continue to invite women to join our community? Is yes, what must we do now and as we move forward? If no, what must we do now and as we move forward?

b. What about our sponsored works? Do we continue to financially support and sponsor them?

c. What about our Mother House? How do we view it? Do we see it as our home? Should we consider selling it? How do we best prepare for our future? What about Ross Hall and skilled nursing? How do we view **Ross Hall in light of our future/ownership?**

S. A suggestion for how groups respond: When a group says "Lines of communication are not open" that they add "as evidenced in" and give an example.

T. We acknowledge the mourning of the loss of the past (community as we knew it when we entered) but we have trust in God and the future. We are planting seeds and we won't see the results---it's our gift to community and to the world, and we want to witness that we are OK with that. Things are shifting and we see we are called to be leaven---to be with the "folks," especially the poor and disenfranchised. We are more in tune, and want to be more of a witness of our Vincentian spirituality – to get to know the Vincentian saints and how to express the Vincentian spirit in our day. Our value today is more in who we are than in what we do. We are willing to be in the liminal space; open to what the Spirit wants---we are collaborators (with Associates, Vincentian Family, Federation), realizing that we are representing Someone else.

**Who are we, SCLs, in our day? Who do we want to be? (Since some groups combined their responses to this, the responses to both questions are included together.)**

A. We have heard the spirit and call of Vatican II (the incorporation of the laity into the work of ministry) and call others into ministry so that when we move on, the ministry can go on. ii) We hear often a perception that we who are religious see things differently—others in the church recognize that and commend it. iii) We represent a remnant of the institutional services that have served us well; in our day, we must respond to the new critical needs of education, the “new” kind of orphan, health care. iv) We are willing to allow our members to go places where there is not a “path,” meeting new needs. v) We want to be attentive to/participate in the evolution of our charism and the impacts that will make on us as we live it. vi) We want to come from a contemplative place that will lead us to become liminal people.

B. We are women who identify from the heart not the task and being smaller leads to vitality and living with confidence into the future, we are open to collaboration, contemplation and as gospel women, followers of Jesus we are open to respond to the critical needs of others today we are women of the church but not ecclesiastics. We continue to be open to evolve.

C. Women not too bothered by formalities, who see a need and get moving, who are close. Who work with sick, poor, dying, lonely, shut-ins. Who see critical needs and their systemic causes. Who, in collaboration with those who also embrace Gospel values, affirm our evolving charism and aim to re-envision our ministry.

Move away from dualisms: Sisters or Associates, Spirit or Matter, ourselves. Ritualize grief and move to both/and, non-dual thinking. Live with permeable boundaries, no tribalisms. Become a better part of the Vincentian Family and Charity Federation. Listen for the Spirit and celebrate movement in others (such as the exemplification of the charism in our MH workers). Expand circles through Facebook, etc., to foster contemplative reflection and response to needs. Be with those in need, such as the immigrants today. Become a better version of myself. Face seasons as a manifestation of the paschal mystery. Learn from the universe.

D. \*All of our discussion and (correlated) suggestions reflect our Mission Statement: “...Impelled by our Baptismal Commitment, we claim as our own the prophetic mission of Jesus and our call to discipleship...”

\*Our traditional identity is nestled or embedded in The Church. Let’s consider a broader identity, for example being stewards of the earth, of God’s creation rather than Women of the Church. Language limits our perceptions and our vision.

\*We want to place our life in a new and realistic format, in a re-founding position...to be a catalyst toward a new paradigm. We can make this possible in collaboration with and participating in the works of the Charity Federation. It will be a new look!

\*We are aging but we have not stopped living; we can contribute **more** by taking concrete steps toward many social justice issues, such as working on public statements on issues like gun control, for example. We can work with influential parties such as immigration lawyers,

bishops, politicians, our federation, etc. and encourage (or demand) that they take a public stance, as well.

\*Do more networking, put energy into expanding our horizons, like big corporations successfully do. It is a big attitude adjustment!

\*Finally, in these many new and different ways, we can recognize that we are still in God's presence, still doing God's work, by "[walking} our society into the crisis where it does not want to go, and [walking] our society out of that crisis into newness that it does not believe is possible". (Brueggeman)

E. We will need, in view of our diminishment, to acquire additional dependable and trustworthy individuals who have the skills and ability to assist us in our planning and executing of current and future needs of sustainability in the financial and physical aspects of our lives. We need to recognize and accept in peace and hope that religious life as we have known it will soon be gone but that it will rejuvenate in a different form according to God's plan.

F. We are aging, mostly Caucasian, middle-class, well educated women who question whether we can encourage younger women to embrace our life. We feel that the directional statement calls us to something different, something deeper. Our challenge is to give shape to who we want to be as we continue these conversations.

Aware of our demographic reality and the limitations that reality brings, especially regarding the question of new members, determine if we are open and able to accompany new members.

Utilize our recently formed interest groups to identify critical needs that press us to invest time, energy and resources in both the near and distant future.

In reflecting on future needs (see pages 226-228 of O'Murchu article), we suggest assessing them in light of the Vincentian charism and converging with other Vincentians where necessary in training/educational and ministerial responses.

G. First we want to acknowledge that there was good energy and enthusiasm around this discussion.

Our Leaven Group feels that "Who we are" is partially defined in our Directional Statement Chapter 2016. We affirm our call to be Women of the Church, and members of the Vincentian Family who embrace Gospel values and seek justice and charity in our day. We acknowledge we are an established community who see change in numbers, resources, and note that the future will look different than the past. Therefore, collaboration with others, who also embrace Gospel values, will be essential in our future.

We want to sustain our Vincentian Mission (charism) as we re-envision our ministries and sponsored works. We challenge ourselves to take bold steps in examining and responding to the critical needs of our day. We want to pay attention to the poor, marginalized, and exploited through prophetic witness, acts of charity and justice, and work towards systemic change.

We want to affirm the choice of the article by Diarmuid O’Murchu, which moved us to creative thinking and enthusiasm for possibilities of our own re-founding in our day.

H. We are in a period of fewer Sisters in our SCL community and we are addressing the normal health issues of our elderly Sisters. Yet we are cognizant that our ministerial thrust must meet the complex-multicultural world of tomorrow.

We believe that “Religious Life has changed but not ended .” As Sisters of Charity contemplatively loving Our Creator, one another and the world, we are daughters of the Church, Vincent, Louise and Xavier.

We want to be creative, consecrated persons keeping ourselves”intellectually open and as adaptable as possible,” keeping our ministry in tandem with the needs of the times as they change. Hopefully, in a deeper partnership with our growing number of committed Associates, we will continue to acquire the new skills needed as we become catalysts for the Re-founding to which we are called.

I. We are:

- Vital and alive through our sponsored works.
- Open to looking for ways God is calling us now
- Supportive of those living in poverty—following Vincent, Louise and Xavier
- Value the participation of all
- Diminishing community, but not without hope
- Not risk takers
- Very secure, especially financially (maybe too secure). Need to be stable, but may be able to do more for others. Perceived as a “rich” community.
- Strong spirituality—contemplative view.

We want to be:

- A channel of God’s love. Vibrant courageous women of God.
- Open to the future God is calling us to. Vibrant, courageous women of God.
- Immersed in the sacredness of God’s creation and reclaiming contemplation. See through the eyes of the spirit.
- Be where the action is.
- More collaborative in the causes we work on as a community. Overcome dualism— between sacred and secular, contemplative and action. Processing to come to common goals.
- More responsive to those in need—those living in poverty.

J. We are a community of SCLs. Women who have responded to the call, looking for and affirming our reason to be a witness of life, with openness to diversity.

We want to be women carriers of hope who walk in freedom opening our hearts of God, listening and responding to his call.

K. We are women of hope who are deeply concerned with our sisters and brothers and

their critical needs. We recognize the reality that we are in this time of Calvary with our aging and fewer numbers. However, we know that this is a holy time of grace and opportunity as in our prayer and openness to transformation lie the possibilities of future seedlings of new life as religious life will continue to evolve for the mission of Jesus. Through our contemplative prayer, presence, and faithfulness, we stand together in God's loving and merciful presence.

L. Acknowledging that there is much that is unknown about our future, and needs to be because we don't know what the needs will be, we know:

Now, we are a white, middle class, group of American women.

- We have to be willing to live with questions and perhaps no answers.
- We have to be open to change.
- We have to understand our implicit biases, our fears of change, and our denial of the reality of our community at this time.
- We have to become an inclusive community that welcomes diversity of cultures and all that implies (ethnicity, language, way of life and thinking....).

We recommend the community engage in a cultural audit to help us understand who we are, an understanding that is necessary before we can become more intercultural.

M. We are women grounded in prayer.

We are women who want to collaborate with those who have a similar focus: Vincentian charism, associates

- We are women who see the signs of the times. We are not first responders, but quick followers
- We are consecrated women, pilgrims on a journey, walking a bridge

N. We are on a journey within the Paschal Mystery of death and decline with trust in the Resurrection of new life. We continue to be energetic and open to the Spirit who is leading us in the issues of today, e.g. trafficking, care of the earth, collaboration, contemplative dialogue.

We know that this is a holy time of grace and opportunity as in our prayer and openness to transformation lie the possibilities of future seedlings of new life as religious life will continue to evolve for the mission of Jesus. Through our contemplative prayer, presence, and faithfulness, we stand together in God's loving and merciful presence.

O. The chapter from O'Murchu's book was a source of positive energy to our discussion about who we are and our future. Collaboration is a key understanding – collaboration in the Vincentian family, the Charity Federation, our associates and other religious groups and agencies.

We suggest doing more study and contemplative dialogue on O'Murchu's "dispositions" leading to decisions about community life as we move into our future.

P. Examine our gifts. What new and broader gifts and skills do we have for now and into the future? As gospel heralds and ministers of faith, hope, charity and courage in this complex

Multicultural world, we must be equipped to be who we profess to be. We cannot be afraid to announce the gospel by our presence, our listening, our actions and our prayers.

Become open and willing to experience new models of living, of governance, etc. This must be dealt with realistically in terms of our demographics.

There is an expressed desire to have conversations on various issues, both internal and external. However, we need to keep a careful balance and not become too inward focused!

With the state of our country and world in chaos, our mission is to respond to the needs of today verbally, through action, by empowering justice, taking risks, putting our money where our mouths are: immigrations, environment, the poor, etc.

Continue to collaborate with the Federation, Vincentian Family and other appropriate partners, as that will be major in our future.

Q. We are faith-filled women committed to the Gospel of Jesus and strive to share that with others. We are women well-respected as a community, standing on the reputation of the many marvelous women who have gone before us. We are women who respond to the needs of the times. We are women educated with college degrees. We are mono-cultural.

We want to be women who network, women who live counter-cultural lives - as contemplatives in action, as Gospel heralds. We want to be peacemakers, bridge-builders, justice-focused. We want to be followers of Jesus. We want to reach out to those in need in our part of our troubled world; we want to be there for others, especially women and children. We want to be multi-cultural **in the fullest sense**.

R. The personal reading/reflection on the article and the shared dialogue was mutually, challenging, inspirational and grace-filled for the members of the group. Our lived experience mirrored many of the elements of O'Murchu's writing. Together we appreciated the historical context; the invitation to be more open to the unfolding of the communal Paschal Mystery; to continue to read the signs of the times (multiple examples were shared of how this has unfolded in our lifetime in community); and a recognition of our diminishment, dying; yet also of our current active living.

This Leaven group session deepened our connection, brought to life the **WORDS** of the Chapter 2016 Direction Statement. We recognize our call, the significance of our baptism, the ongoing desire to follow Jesus and to walk the path of charity and justice.

Over many decades, we realized that our community leaders have invited us to ongoing formation; to become a learning community; to embrace faith-sharing and now contemplative dialogue. We have long been dedicated to service of God's people, but in recent times we have moved more explicitly to collaboration with others; to re-envisioning our ministries; to embrace more deeply the Vincentian charism, the care of the poor and vulnerable; to an awareness of our responsibility to care for the Earth. As a Leaven group we are deeply aware of the chaos

and violence in our world, but sense within our community an overall acceptance of differences and that the polarities of the years of change in religious life have dissipated and the dichotomies have melted away.

We definitely concurred with the O'Murchu's statement that in the future religious communities of women "will remain fundamentally ecclesial, but not necessarily ecclesiastical".

As a group, we pray to be accepting of the dying of what has been, continue to plant seeds as we are able and entrust the lasting nature of the charism of Charity to God's Providence for the future Re-founding.

S. How do we acknowledge and ritualize the completion of the community as we have known and lived it in order to be open to re-founding? This includes having an honest discussion about vocations.

T. We are:

- A community wanting to move forward, yet holding back. We don't know how to move forward, we are more followers than first movers
- Need to not be by-standers, but be creators; collaborate with others in the Vincentian family, and the SCLAs
- Mother Xavier looked at the needs of the times and we continue to do that
- We've been quick followers, not first. We eventually get there. WE need to pay attention to the grassroots influencers
- A community that has always listened, and responded in good time.
- We are steeped in music; many musicians and musical as a community
- Consecrated women; on a journey; pilgrim people on a bridge. Be people who question and ponder and search.
- We are discerning women of God, grounded in prayer. We'll be somewhat the same, but it will look different. The image of leaven – a small amount has a wide impact.

How do these ideas relate to our directional statement?

- Baptismal call
- Evolving charism
- It says what we DO, not what we are
- Not so much; says WE are
- It is just words. Have we done anything radical? Can we give life to these words?
- Stretches and challenges us
- All interwoven, intertwined

Where do we need clarity about who we are today? What is the next level of thinking we need?

- Need to answer if we want to die or grow. Move full speed ahead. Think about selling property.
- Take a realistic look at our own reality and say how that influences what we do. Need serious thought and reflection.

- Re-envision. Needs some work.
- Structure with questions we can consider in conjunction with others. We are women grounded in our God.
- Network with other groups, don't repeat what someone else is doing.
- Question about who we are is life-long, changes frequently. Not as essential as moving forward.
- We are women who desire to be faithful to the commitment we've made and to the future. We have an important role – pilgrims, journeying along a bridge. We need to be comfortable with the lack of clarity, Women who trust the Spirit.

U. How do we acknowledge and ritualize the completion of the community as we have known and lived it in order to be open to re-founding? This includes having an honest discussion about vocations.

V. We want to be known as women of God, women of prayer, helpers of the poor, women who love others like we mean it, who love inclusively. We are women called to go to the edge, be there, to stand with those who need us. We see the need and value of creating unstructured time together. Being mindful of our relationship with one another we will create unstructured time together---to pray, to play, to know one another as vowed members of the same community. The difference we see (in comparison to dedicated, prayerful "lay" women) is that there is accountability for us to community and for community to us. We realize there is a delicate balance today---ministry, spirituality, community – but that it is in embracing all that we become/are community. We are women who need and ask for faith, not clarity, as we look for the good that is yet to be!

**Is there any issue your group would like to raise on this topic in addition to what you have said above?**

A. Along with the many topics and issues that have already been raised that continue to be of great concern for us, we also are deeply concerned about our elderly, now and in the future, as the present political administration continues to chip away at Medicaid, Medicare, and Social Security, those programs upon which our most vulnerable, our elderly, those who have disabilities, and those with special needs, and our children desperately depend. Perhaps we could continue to ponder practical and particular ways that we might support our most vulnerable through advocacy as well as sharing our presence and resources as we are able.

B. We appreciate the quality of the materials that were provided for this conversation. Please do not “check the box” and say we’re done; we need further, broader, deeper conversations around this topic.

More conversations about the various, valid manifestations about how we live community life—living alone, together, and the various virtual communities many of us are already living.

C. Continue our discernment process as we move into the future, e.g. use of resources, property, etc.

Offer an educational opportunity for the entire community on the theology of religious life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

We want to reiterate that readings such as, O’Murchu’s article was so helpful. More like this!

D. We need a Ritual of Mourning, which is evident in the comments from the fall gatherings.

There are assumptions, frustrations, and a difficulty in letting go of old mind-sets. If we are living the Paschal Mystery, we recognize that there is no new life without dying...and we cannot grieve alone! We suggest this could happen sometime during our gathering this summer.

We propose that as part of this summer’s assembly, there be some small group sharing (4 in a group, movement to new groups every half hour or so) of sisters varying in age, geography, experiences, living alone, different ministries, etc. to talk about what is going on in our lives...to assist us in moving forward. It appears there are many assumptions regarding: living at the Mother House and/or issues there; living alone or in groups of two; unawareness of what ministries sisters are involved in (especially with many of us “actively retired”). This could also be a spring-board to move us out of our comfort zones and/or empowering us to discover gifts within that are dormant. Planned questions could be suggested.

\*\*\*We are aware of the above repetition but want to make the point that we believe our statements are very important!!

E. The Leaven 5 group recommends to the Assembly Planning Committee that we hold a ritual to mourn (an element of Grief) the diminishment of our community, a “letting go” of what has been and an embrace of what our future holds. In the words of Diarmuid O’Murchu, “I feel saddened but not frightened” and we move ahead together “in the contemplative waiting that sensitizes us to what the pregnant Spirit wants to bring to birth.”

F. Could we look at alternative forms of membership/association e.g. shorter time commitments, married members, members/associated persons of all ages?  
Continue to unfold the design and implementation of a spiral model of governance.

G. We are grateful that the Governance Committee sent all the Leaven responses to us for discussion.

H. We want to speed up the process; we want to start asking and answering questions. Perhaps we should meet more often as a community, maybe twice a year; or, start cross-pollinating by joining with other Leaven Groups and having conversations with them. Please give us a question to discuss and answer in our Leaven Group, letting us bring that conversation to Leaven Assembly.

I. We want to reiterate that readings such as, O’Murchu’s article was so helpful. More like this!

J. Assure that decisions for the community are taken after having consulted with the community, and please remind us in a timely fashion to save and bring response type sheets to avoid having to reprint as some did at this session.

K. No

L. Begin the topic of the future use of the Mother House and Ross Hall

Discuss how we can identify and energize young people to follow the mission of Vincent like the young people at the 400th anniversary in Rome

We request dates for coming meetings for planning purposes

M. Further education on climate change and care of the earth.

Survey of the associates’ human resources and skills that will enhance our joint ministry.

Task force to discern realistic vocation and formation programs as we acknowledge our present day lack of new SCL candidates.

N. The material on the subject of the Re-foundation has another look from Latin America because it has already been thought about and worked on at the level of the consecrated life. We recommend that if there is a similar issue we can acquire material here to avoid the work of translation and follow together the reflection.

Thank you for the service and work of translation and also our gratitude to the Governance Committee.

O. Recommendation continues to close our initial formation program.

P. We are grateful that the Governance Committee sent all the Leaven responses to us for discussion.

Q. Nothing at this time.

## Other:

- A. Some individuals in the community will not be able to accept the reality. Some sisters will have difficulty accepting a lay superior or administrator. Some will resist the sale of our property or possibly having to go to a local nursing care facility should the need arise.
- B. Working with lay women with happy hearts and heavy burdens with greater compassion and awareness (aides, lay teachers, hospital personnel) find ways to share goodness, trust...their belief in the Lord is incredible...find ways to build on that.
- C. Much to be done...age is against us; our bodies are against us...work with volunteers and younger people to help us carry on forward...many sisters still have the energy within them to help younger generations to do it...help them see how to further the kingdom.
- D. Goodness and thoughtfulness in our employees and their families bring us food; we have a lot to offer them in stability and hope for the future.
- E. Each day is an opportunity to instruct and by example...employees are hungry to learn and help...take the time; I get discouraged, at times...my comments and example witness what I can do now. What we have done in our ministries are the fruits of our labors...we are not able to be as active but we enter more into contemplation.
- F. When I first read it, I wanted to run as far as I could; tell me what it said.
- G. We did not have any idea that we were at the top of the curve...we must support our younger sisters...learn from other communities and their dealing with transitions.
- H. In its others to consider options to assist in ministries...not always helpful to train...we have individual contacts...what is each of us able to do.
- I. We are examples of reality, of what aging is...our attitude to aging is contagious...if we are happy, feel useful...accept aging...they will remember and think about their own attitudes regarding aging...folks have problems...they know we pray for them and activities...example and pray I learn reality from them...their kindness...they notice the needs we have and meet them...I am grateful...know what nursing homes are like and we appreciate the care we receive...our employees are also enhanced by our appreciation.
- J. Well done article...need to review it again...lots of good points in it.
- K. Live each day the very best we can and leave it in God's hands.
- L. Encourage the Spirit to get this going as soon as possible.

M. Education...we need to be educated to the trends of this 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

N. How do we deal with our declining numbers?

O. Other Comments and Suggestions Sent to Us: (Sisters who facilitated the LL)

- Get information from communities who have had success or problems moving forward (for instance, Sisters of Corondelet in St. Louis).

- Prayer and conversation.

- Effort to support our emotional needs.

- Effort to encourage peace and joy as these changes occur.

- Effort to support our younger sisters in their ministry and membership in community as things change.