

## Thick Conversations Gathering

January 4-6, 2019

Responses to:

***"As we consider creating a future in some distant time,  
what is required of us when we speak of communal life and vocations?"***

### Acceptance of Candidates:

We question that we should continue to accept potential vocations.

It was good to hear whether we should continue accepting women to our community. We need to address this. There are many facets to the vocation issue: culture ethnicity, lifestyle etc. that older sisters were not faced with. No easy answers.

Should we continue to accept vocations?

We have not voiced the 'issue' of not accepting candidates to the SCLs.

The examination of vocations is necessary at this time. Do we accept?

We voiced the possibility that we may cease inviting new candidates.

To refuse to take new members is to assume that our current model of religious life is the only viable model. A handful of committed people can comprise religious life. Don't restrict the possibilities.

Is it time to consider a community living will? What is our wisdom – our wish – for the future? What do we want to leave as our legacy? If we can be sustained, let's do it. And where and in what ways? If not?

We may, down the road, have to deal with the question of 'Should we stop taking candidates' as there are too many years between them and us. It is not fair or just to expect a young woman to do this alone without some companionship.

Are we at a point where we should not continue to invite young people?

We are not ready to call the question YET about whether we should accept new vocations anymore. But maybe soon.

Is it time to say that we will no longer accept new members?

Community as we know it is dying. Culture and history are totally different now. Permanent commitment is rare. Religious life will become a temporary service of the poor done by members of all ethnic groups having worked through our prejudices.

Consider a moratorium on recruitment; previous formation models not adequate.

Do we want to continue vocation recruitment actively??

## **Membership Options:**

We need to be willing to think differently. Vocations may be very different in the future; e.g. married couples.

Explore options for membership: volunteers, yearly commitment.

Shall we look at the idea of accepting temporary vocations?

We would like to redefine what vocation means in order to look at new models that include the laity whether there is temporary vocation or service and spiritual based commitment.

Can we imagine pulling together 3-5 sparks into the same house to offer intentional living? A place that could be for short-term living or a formation setting?

Explore the temporary membership idea. That can start now.

Perhaps it is time to stop inviting as we have and perhaps consider temporary vocations, etc.

Look at new models of membership and communal life.

I also suggest we study the possibility of temporary commitment.

New models of membership.

We would appreciate learning more about different types of membership and/or opportunities for women to share in our lives as religious.

Issue of merger or some other form of sharing with the Federation.

Consider yearly commitments.

Maximize our membership in the Charity Federation for vocation and formation.

Commit to a joint Charity Federation program for formation of vowed members.

Vocations: explore new models: Federation-wise and vowed/non-vowed.

Consider the aspect of coming – living with us – for one year rather than geared toward vows. Then one year at a time vowed commitment.

There is a need to look at our formation program and ‘future’ candidates. Should we invite women who are seeking community, spirituality and mission to live with us not necessarily as vowed members?

In lieu of the present reality of our cultures (fear of permanent commitment), would we ever consider returning to the earlier times of Vincent and Louise and encourage younger entrants to make yearly vows on a certain date (say March 25)? I don't think younger people will be so fearful of a one year commitment (like the Daughters of Charity). A certain percentage will stay forever.

How about NONES and Nuns, Xavier Communities with tracks designed for ongoing commitment?

Encouraging our younger sisters to help in the process of defining a new or improved way to train/accept vocations with vows a year at a time or later the desire to stay with the community for a life time.

Question our language of traditional definitions of vocation and community life. Can we look more outside the box?

Are we open to the idea of inviting lay people to come and experience service for the church and making a one year commitment with us? As Vatican II encouraged 'let the lay people claim their place in active service with Church – the Church is the people (not the bishops and priests!)

**Assessment Tool:**

Can we use a tool(s) to more accurately assess the current ability and willingness to invite and retain new members?

I think we should definitely consider the tools Sr. Vicki mentioned and various forms of membership- especially yearly commitments.

Let us use the assessment tool Sr. Vicki suggested to determine the viability of continued invitation.

Can we find appropriate tools to put together the community decision to keep recruiting vocations or not?

Would be interested in learning more about resources that S. Vicki talked about. Resources that helped a community decide about taking vocations, etc.

**'Younger Sisters':**

The younger age groups should meet at some point to voice their thoughts about the future and present them to the top half of the community in a panel or .....

I strongly endorse having a report/suggestions from our younger sisters.

Have young sisters meet and tell the rest of us what they think.

How do younger members think/feel about not inviting new candidates?

I strongly support the youngest members of the community putting their collective wisdom to the issues.

We 'older persons' are likely to judge the vocation admission question from a tired perspective. Let us activate the opinions, ideas, suggestions of those who are younger, who understand and know the perspectives of the Federation, etc.

Have the younger members (less than 60) meet and figure what they need and want as we go into the future. The rest of us listen to them.

## **Communal Living:**

Communal living is not our apparent and current focus. Will it ever be again? Does it need to be?

What is community and/or what is communal life? Live, eat, pray together = community. Missioned, connected, supported and not necessarily living together = community. We also talked about the unity is in diversity!

Our community life should inspire other women to be part of SCLs because where is one sisters, all SCLs are there.

Do we understand the full implications of welcoming a woman of another ethnic and cultural background?

Are we willing to invest, and be transformed, in living in houses with more than 1-2 sisters?  
Who is willing to commit to the prayer styles and lifestyles of those who enter the SCL community?

We need to evaluate how we live community. There may be new models offered and to adapt to the needs of a particular group of sisters.

Communal life: recognize that we are all SCLs wherever we are and live community together.

If we choose to accept candidates of varied ethnic backgrounds, we must be willing to change our assumptions and prejudices regarding those that are 'other'.

Is our SCL community as we live, pray, and minister 'attractive' to those responding to God's call?

We need to talk about community living. What are the real basics, not just 'living together'? What are its variations and rational for these? Or are we at the point of 'anything goes'?

Living in 'ones' – not being discussed.

Community living is not what it used to look like – several people under one roof. Individuals living alone are still community-minded and intentional about being part of community activities, events, etc.

Still need to face our resistance to really changing our idea of what community life should look like or how we accept a new vocation – sense that she 'fits in' rather than we might have to change.

Can we invite women seeking a commitment to communal living and prayer? Do we have houses that are consistent in these practices?

How do we identify ourselves as community? What kind of community do we invite people to?

Is there a difference between communal living and community?

What can we do to really unpack the unstated considerations of community qualities that support community vocations?

We are living as we want to live and we are not willing to change. Why should we?

Wanting some kind of definition of community.

**Other:**

The descriptions given do not speak to who we are as SCLs.

What kind of vocations are we looking for? The monastic type? The descriptions don't describe us.

The question of mission is important.

For my entire religious life (50 years) religious life has been changing. Church in 'de-repair'

Sense of our togetherness.

Underneath our conversation we hear concern but more trust in God than anxiety.

I think underneath, and not being voiced, is a fear/discomfort/unease about looking very realistically about our future. Women aren't coming and/or they are not staying. Do we have a future? What does it look like: temporary commitment?

Underlying concern: Are we reluctant to address our demise? We need to begin discussing how, who, when we make decisions concerning property, elder needs, etc.

We need to be planning (not making decisions) about our future. For example, can we identify the topics we should be addressing such as property? An example of what we have already done is establish Xavier Corporation for our retirement needs.

Maybe invite sisters who feel that vocation efforts should continue, to have the opportunity to brainstorm everything from inviting, retaining, communal living-during and following vows.

I hope that we can be open to a variety of responses to Jesus' call to follow in discipleship.

Charity Federation is the place for collaboration for vocation and formation work.

My questions is – creating a future at some distant time – is it truly at a distant time or do we need to now have more discussion about communal life and vocations?

Frustration with the pace of change.

Fear of change, failure, loss of credibility, lack of ownership is holding us back.

There was no mention of our society today i.e. lack of commitment, family life, membership in the Catholic Church is down because of the sexual abuse scandal, no leadership of women in the Church. It's a different world out there!

Because of global perspective; awareness of justice issues, experiences of church and other institutions, young people have a different sense of what is confining and what is freeing. We need to adapt our vocation/formation programs to allow for mutual change and growth.

Discussion on vocations: using the tools to access – expanding/changing membership.

We need to reach our young (18 – 39) Catholic persons who need and want guidance from adults about marriage, finances, volunteering, spirituality, honest living, etc., parenting, responding to responsibility – who needs support?

We need to be courageous and willing to change, willing to address our biases and prejudices in order to welcome new members.

The topic energized my living daily!

Appreciation given to Therese Horvat and her publishing record. She and so many of her references display "the call and ministries of the call to charity and justice." Is there a way to appreciate her gifts?

We could/should welcome/accept women who want to join us. However, we should do so in groups like maybe 10-15 at a time – not singles.

We are an active community – mission is integral. Do not lose sight of that. Hard to blend that and spirituality for young adults because since they can be immersed in service maybe not recognizing that is mission.

This is an absolutely complex issue with many layers. There are many vocations in the lives of young people. Many good insights in the afternoon sharing.

Are we ready to face the question of dying out, merging with another congregation or creating options for lay people to live with us?

A very good meeting/experience! Great honest. Good insights. Highly organized.

Where and how does the Peruvian community discern the challenges of their future, especially with the declining numbers of North American SCLs?

CARA: sounds like monastery living and not us.

Openness! Courage! Trust in the Holy Spirit. Let the Lord guide us and fear becomes less. I have learned a great deal from the sisters today. Fear will always be with us. It is a human condition. Vocations are out there. We need to explore new ways in bringing new life to community.

Be thankful and generous to whatever God is calling us to.

Make a more concerted effort to be inclusive, especially with regard to our Peruvian part of the community.

Why do we not accept women after the age of 40? Look at how many congregations were started by widows after marriage. Women at the age of 40 have tried the world business and are looking for deeper aspects of life; spirituality.

While we continue to strengthen ourselves in Leavenworth, the Church is growing and has great needs in the West and Southwest and we continue to diminish in the West.

Mission is fourth on the list of what is attractive about religious life.

Intensive study of other forms of formation and other forms of commitment: temporary, un-vowed, etc.

Some anxiety around not having clear direction or answers.

Are we helping people prepare for transition, age, and death?

The primary focus of apostolic commitments like ours is mission. Do we need to explore the question of mission e.g. Is it possible to know what our future mission will be or what do we need to \_\_\_\_\_ to rediscover it?

Recognizing that people are not being attracted to our community as vowed members. This crossroad can lead us into 1) the reality of not continuing or 2) explore different forms of membership or associations. If we explore the 'new forms' incumbent on us to deal with our racism and white privilege.

Community life is diverse from Peru and the U.S. In the U.S. there are sisters that live alone. I am questioning this and I ask myself "Do I consider community life (an experience with lay and/or families? Or do I continue thinking in exclusiveness?"

Underneath all of these discussions I hear both hope and fear.

Reconsider what formation consists of – consider ALL Charity communities.

Consider current ramifications of the clergy issue.

Is the Vincentian Family where communal living opportunities will come?

Look at the possibility of asking other NONE community members to join us in our homes.

There may be a deep fear of letting go that lies underneath our willingness to let go!

We all want to be willing to let go but the challenge lies in what we need to let go!

What do we do as a community with our property, buildings, sponsored works, etc.? All need to be involved!

Let us identify the 'older sisters' who find new community ideas exciting and wish to participate at least in thoughts.