



## **Grounded in the Present, Embracing the Future**

*By Michael O'Loughlin, Marketing and Communications Director*

Participants in the 2021 United States Provincial Assembly carefully considered our community's charism on July 16 while also imaging the possibilities of the future of religious life. The assembly was held virtually via Zoom video technology, with delegates and observers joining from all across the country.

The assembly's opening prayer ritual included images, music, and the voices of our sisters exploring themes that our community is encountering today, including responding to the pandemic; confronting the evils of racism, violence, and climate change; and becoming bridge builders as we join with the next generations in shaping the future of our Church, our nation, and our world.

That ritual segued into the opening remarks of Provincial Coordinator Sister Kathleen O'Brien. "How do we respond to God's call today and into the future?" Sister Kathleen asked. She referenced *kintsugi*, an ancient Japanese art of repairing broken pottery by mending the areas of breakage with lacquer mixed with gold or silver. "*Kintsugi* enhances the repaired piece," she explained. "The art doesn't try to recreate what was, but instead creates something new and beautiful."

The future of religious life can be seen in the same way, Sister Kathleen said, and she asked assembly participants to contemplate what religious life was and may become. "You sense something new is coming, and we are to create space for 'the new' to emerge," she said.

“For centuries, we have been the Church’s labor force, staffing its institutions,” Sister Kathleen continued. “Today, we can use the influence we have to speak truth to the Church. We can be a collaborative, inclusive community that can partner with like-minded groups while staying grounded in our charism.”

Sister Anne Munley, IHM, who facilitated the morning’s discussion, characterized this as “a time of deep change and multiple challenges.” She said the pandemic has shown all of us the great value of contemplative presence and she outlined three principles of contemplative dialogue: contemplative listening, contemplative speaking, and creation of the “we space”—that is, the ability to build upon and connect with one another rather than debating or trying to convince others.

Five sisters then participated in contemplative dialogue (pictured above), considering the question, “What stirs in your hearts as you ponder the current context and call of the province at this time?” Participants included Sisters Mary Carroll, Fran Cunningham, Deborah Fumagalli, Rose Hacker, and Arlene Woelfel. Following their sharing, all sisters and associates were invited to participate in contemplative dialogue in breakout rooms, and later shared some of the fruits of those small-group discussions.

“Your congregation and province are gifts to religious life,” Sister Anne said at the conclusion of the morning’s work. “You are trying to make space in the present while the future is still emerging.”

### **Steering Committee Elected**

In the afternoon session, four sisters were elected to serve on the Provincial Assembly Steering Committee. Sisters Barbara Goertz, Rosemary Herriges, Margaret Kwiatkowski, and Beth Schmitz were elected on the first ballot, with Sister Barbara being chosen as the committee chairperson and Sister Beth being selected as her successor.

Accounting Director Carrie Hamer presented an update of the province’s financial report, including an update of the TRENDS report. As she reviewed 2020 and 2021 financial projections, she noted that the province is carefully monitoring investment performance, assessing the cost of care, continuing cost containment and reduction measures, liquidating unneeded or underperforming assets, and pursuing outside funding.

Sister Marlene Neises, chair of Finance Committee, concluded the financial report by focusing on the goals we have for the province’s finances, including supporting the province’s mission-related ideas, planning for health and retirement needs, and supporting administrative needs and responsibilities. She expressed gratitude for the strategies of the past decades that have yielded the financial position the province enjoys today.

“We are committed to proactively working to extend our dollars,” Sister Marlene said. “We need to stay alert and study and act on the TRENDS reports, the possibilities to increase revenue and decrease expenses, and to understand the vulnerabilities that might impact expenses. With your prayers and actions, we believe that we will.”

In other business, delegates

- Voted to affirm the province’s Formation Plan
  - Remembered and honored our sisters who have died since the start of the pandemic
  - Officially closed the final session of the 11th Cycle of the Provincial Assembly
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