

March 13, 2025

*“But now that so much is changing, is it not up to us to change ourselves? Could we not develop ourselves a little, and slowly take upon ourselves our share of work in love, little by little?” ~ Rainer Maria Rilke*

Dear Sisters:

Douglas Steere once said, “To listen another’s soul into a condition of disclosure and discovery may be almost the greatest service that any human being ever performs for another.” This was the effort made among the discerners during their Discernment Retreat in Tampa, March 6 – 8. The 21 Sisters who gathered for the Discernment Retreat walked with one another in faith, hope and love. Though anxious, at times, with the invitation to be transparent and direct in conversations, they persevered and gently unfolded deeper layers of truth and wisdom along the way.

The sisters who attended the Discernment Retreat (see attached) have taken a significant step in deepening their journey of discernment. We wish to express our deepest gratitude to everyone who offered prayers, support, and personal messages as well as the discerners, themselves, for all their hard work. The spirit of good will, no doubt, generated by your collective prayers and efforts, permeated their three days together.

During the discernment retreat, the sisters shared their hopes, apprehensions, excitement and confusion regarding the emerging approach to leadership and governance. They built on your work and continued to develop possible shifts in the way leadership is done. They prayed with and shared their responses to the invitations you gave to them. They gave one another feedback as to how they might see themselves (or not) in leadership. While they shared their “leanings” regarding staying in, or withdrawing from, the process, we have asked them to suspend making any “decisions” until they have shared and discerned with you during the Regional Gathering.

So that you can have a better sense of what your sisters experienced, we would like to describe for you the process through which they journeyed over the three days that we gathered. We would encourage you to talk with them about their experience. Ask them

what assistance they might need to enhance their discernment or what you might need to assist you in yours. During the March 27 -30 Regional Gatherings, you will hear directly from all of them. You will hear what they experienced, how they were affected, their current “leanings,” and what they will need from you to further discern the call to serve in leadership or withdraw their name from consideration. This “decision” will be made during your Regional Gathering in the context of *communal discernment*.

## Description of the discernment gathering process

Thursday, March 6

The discernment retreat began with song and prayer. After an orientation, the sisters then shared the *sacred symbols* that they were asked to bring representing how they saw themselves in this journey of discernment. Each sister shared her symbol and how it spoke to her heart in discernment. She then placed it in the center of our circle. Each sister’s sacred symbol became part of the ambience and a touchstone for her own spiritual journey. Thus, the room became imbued with a spirit-energy and a deepened sense of intimacy that seemed to remain and grow stronger throughout our time together.



The sisters also shared how they were coming and what they hoped would happen during the discernment retreat. And they shared what they needed to let go of, and work with, to be more open to the truth revealed by God, one another, and their own inner voice. In this sharing, the sisters were honest, vulnerable, and real, and it set the tone for our time together.

Sisters then went into small groups to explore their responses to the invitations you gave to them. They explored their perception of the congruence between what they have to offer and what competencies might be needed in leadership at this time. They came back as a large group at the end of the day, gathered in song, and shared their reflections of the day. Their homework for the evening was to reflect with a *Daily Examen*.

Friday March 7

Following morning prayer, the sisters explored the possibilities for a new approach to leadership and governance. They built upon your collective work that was done in your November and January Regional Gatherings. They were given summaries from what emerged at these Regional Gatherings and were asked to further develop possibilities.

They had time for personal reflection before going to small groups. They worked in small groups until the end of the day.

We returned at the end of the day to reflect upon their efforts. They were grateful for the collective effort and exchange of ideas, confused by the complexity and continued ambiguity that remains, excited about new possibilities and insights that emerged, and tired from a hard day's work. It was a challenging day and they had more work to do the following day to complete this exercise.

### Saturday, March 8

Saturday morning began with song and prayer to celebrate *International Women's Day*. The sharing was personal and profound as they recalled the powerful and loving women that had an impact in their own lives. The sisters then returned to the small groups to put together their collective thoughts about a new approach to leadership and governance.

In the afternoon, the sisters presented the work they had done in their small groups. This work was typed up, distributed and presented. This work will be brought to you at the Regional Gatherings for your further development.

We then took a break for quiet personal reflection. The sisters regathered and shared with the large group their current "leanings" as to remaining in, or withdrawing from, the process of discerning leadership. Each sister also provided her primary reason(s) for her leanings. In turn, each sister was blessed by the entire group who promised to companion her in prayer throughout the duration of the discernment process.

All in all, the sisters took a giant leap forward in communal discernment. They risked being vulnerable. They were courageous, candid, and fully engaged. They were increasingly open to the Spirit being revealed in their prayers, reflections, and dialogue. They became a learning community held in the embrace of God and the safety and respect of each other. Please invite these women to share their experiences so that, once again, everyone can become co-discerners on this journey of communal discernment.

### **Regarding "leanings"**

It is important to realize that the sisters who gathered and expressed their "leanings" are very much in process. Some have tremendous ambivalence with no strong leaning one way or another. Some are in flux and may have already shifted from the leanings they indicated while at the retreat. Some have been thrown off center and confused,

while others are more grounded, clear, and confident regarding how they see their call to leadership.

We are asking these sisters to *not* commit to a “decision” (to remain in, or withdraw from, the process) until the Regional Gatherings. We ask everyone *not* to be preoccupied with who is leaning “in” and who is leaning “out,” who might be “elected” and who might not. The time for determining these things will be at the Regional Gatherings and, again, at Chapter. The primary reason is because this discernment process is *communal* as well as *individual*. In other words, decisions are to be made in the context of everyone’s discernment, not just those who gathered for the Discernment Retreat.

This is not to diminish any individual sister’s right and responsibility to decide for herself. Rather, it is to enhance that decision through the wisdom of the whole. This is not to deny the fact that some could easily decide today, if asked. Rather, it is to ensure that the rhythm and interplay between individual and communal discernment is a coordinated dance and not a disjointed or fragmented process wherein each sister makes independent decisions.

### **Regarding “boundaries”**

We have encouraged each sister who came to the retreat to share as much as she feels personally free to share with others in the Congregation and to not share what she might feel uncomfortable in sharing. We do not wish to create a sense of mystique around this experience. To the contrary, we are encouraging respectful conversations and sharing. Please feel free to invite any sister into conversation about her experience. Ask her what she discovered, how she grew, where she struggled. Ask about the process and what occurred. Ask about her experience and how you might assist her and how she might assist you in your discernment. Invite her, then give her the respect in choosing what she feels comfortable in sharing.

Please do *not* to ask anyone to share the leanings of “others.” We ask that each discernor share only her personal journey and *not* her perception of what happened to others, what others said, or to speak on behalf of others. So, if you wish to know what someone experienced, please invite these conversations in a respectful, direct, and one-to-one basis. And please respect their need for safety in choosing what they wish to share.

Continue to pray, discern, and dialogue with those who can assist you. Congratulations for a successful completion of another step in the ongoing journey of discernment! We look forward to seeing you March 27.

## Regional Gatherings

Regional Gatherings will take place **March 27 – 30**. This will be a parallel, hybrid experience similar to what you did in November and January. Sisters in Brazil will gather with the Brazilian sisters in discernment. The other sisters in discernment will gather in Tampa, along with sisters who live in the Tampa area who wish to join them. Sisters who reside at, or wish to come to, the motherhouses in Allegany and Jamaica will gather there and all others will be on Zoom.

In contrast to the previous Regional Gatherings, parts of this Regional Gatherings will be done as an entire Congregation (in person and on Zoom) and other parts will be done in parallel fashion (Brazil gathered among themselves, and U.S. Bolivia, and Jamaica gathered among themselves).

The goals and schedule for the upcoming Regional Gatherings are attached. Other logistics and Zoom links will be forthcoming. Those sisters in the United States and Jamaica who will serve as facilitators and scribes for the Regional Gathering will be meeting on Zoom with Beth on Wednesday, March 26th at 2:00 p.m. (EST) and 1:00 p.m. (EST for Jamaica). Ted will schedule a time to meet with those sisters who will serve as facilitators and scribes in Brazil.

Let us continue to pray with, and for, one another throughout our discernment journey. We look forward to seeing you in a couple of weeks.

Ted Dunn, Ph.D. and Beth Lipsmeyer Dunn, Ph.D.

# **Sisters in Discernment**

## **Those who attended the first discernment retreat**

Listed in Alphabetical Order

- 1. Bernadette Schuler**
- 2. Catherine Cahill**
- 3. Cindy Matthews**
- 4. Colleen Brady**
- 5. Dolores O'Brien**
- 6. Goianira Silva**
- 7. Gwen Melhado**
- 8. Jo Streva**
- 9. Judith Terrameo**
- 10. Lilian Cristina Pinheiro**
- 11. Liliane Araújo Costa**
- 12. Liz Schumacher**
- 13. Lucy Cardet**
- 14. Margaret Magee**
- 15. Marinez Arantes Silva**
- 16. Marlene Weidenborner**
- 17. Melissa Scholl**
- 18. Odette Haddad**
- 19. Pat Klemm**
- 20. Patricia Shirley**
- 21. Patricia Tyre**

### **(22) Kathy Maire**

Kathy Maire had been invited to attend the Discernment Retreat. However, because of her injury and ongoing recovery, her doctor forbade her from traveling. Thus, she did not attend the Discernment Retreat, nor did she participate on Zoom. However, when discussing this with the discerners who were present, they expressed a desire for her to join them going forward, if she is willing and able. In talking with Kathy, she expressed her appreciation and her desire to continue as a discerner. Consequently, she will participate as a discerner during the March 27 – 30 Regional Gatherings. If her decision at that time is to continue in discernment, she will join the other discerners and attend the May 15 – 18, Discernment Retreat.