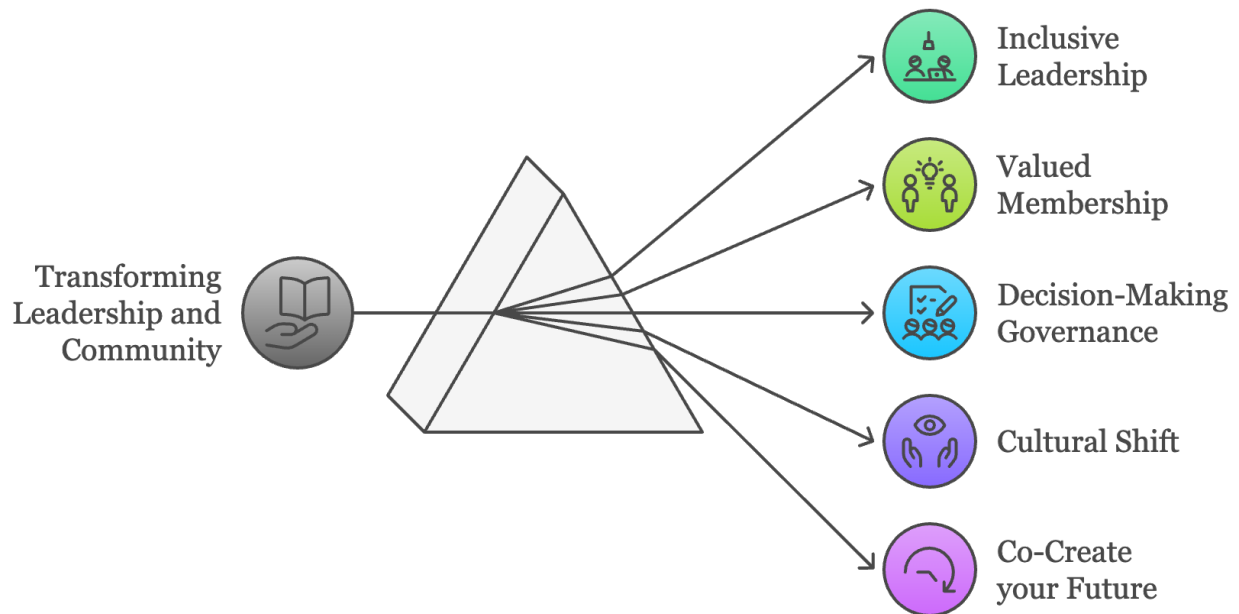


Discerning Leadership AND a New Way Forward

Preparation for Regional Gatherings, January 10 & 11

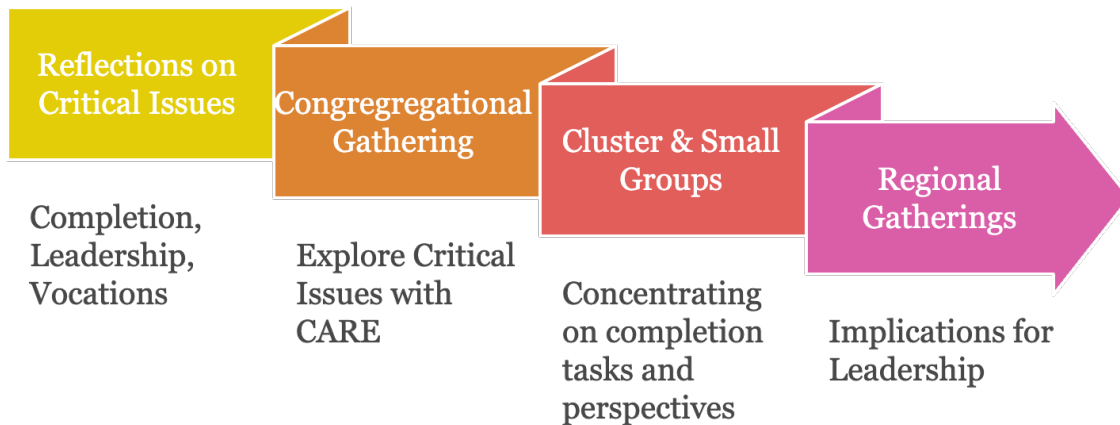


Introduction

Create the kind of leadership of which you'd love to be a part, and the kind of membership where everyone has a place at the table and experiences themselves as valued contributors to the life and mission of the Congregation. This is the goal. This approach to discernment and election is an effort to find more than a handful of leaders that would fit into the same old model. It involves more than changing the current structure of leadership. The goal is to transform the way you live community, make decisions, govern your lives, and partner in co-creating a future full of hope.

Does this goal sound like a lofty aspiration? It is! It is meant to not only “change” things on the surface (e.g., how many in leadership or where they live), but to “transform” the deep layers of community, the culture in which your current structures, mindsets, and patterns of relating are embedded. Is it possible to do this? Absolutely! Other communities have done this and so can you. What will this look like? No one knows for sure what might emerge once you put your minds and hearts together and let the Spirit guide you. As we've said before, if there is no mystery, there is no need for faith. Will it be “rocky” and “muddy” as the song says? Unquestionably! And, “You will get there” – *IF you have the courage, creativity, and tenacity to do this together.*

Chapter Journey: Recapping the Prior Steps



Step 1

Let's briefly retrace the steps you have taken to understand better the rationale for the steps you are about to take. Your first step toward Chapter began when you were asked: "What are the 'critical issues' we need to face as we approach Chapter?" You named "completion," "vocations," and "leadership" as your top three issues.

Step 2

During our Congregational Gathering this summer, you began to explore each of these three critical issues while practicing the CARE skills. You also received a booklet and an overview of what this Chapter journey might be. Those conversations regarding the three critical issues have just begun. They will continue as part of your agenda as you progress through this Chapter journey and beyond.

Step 3

Following the gathering, you chose to focus on "completion in your Cluster and small group conversations. You might recall that the Congregational Gathering had offered a shift in your perspective on completion, and there seemed to be an eagerness to explore this issue further. For this work, you received two of Ted's inputs: one describing Three Pathways to the future and the other explaining Lifecycles and its implications for the critical issues. You identified the "tasks" of completion that are yours to do in each country, the potential "new life" that might open up if you accomplished these tasks, and the deeper "soulwork" that would be needed to engage in this work successfully. You received a summary of this work and the full compilation was posted on the portal.

Step 4

The most recent step was your Regional Gatherings, November 22 & 23. Building upon the Congregation's feedback on "completion," you explored this concept relative to its implications for "leadership." You then viewed and discussed three video presentations on leadership: 1) The Big Picture, 2) Transformative Partnerships, and 3) Processes for Discernment and Elections. While there were specific reflection questions for each of these presentations, all of this was to help you answer this question: "Are you comfortable and content with the way things are, or do you want to change and transform?"

Key Takeaways from Regional Gatherings



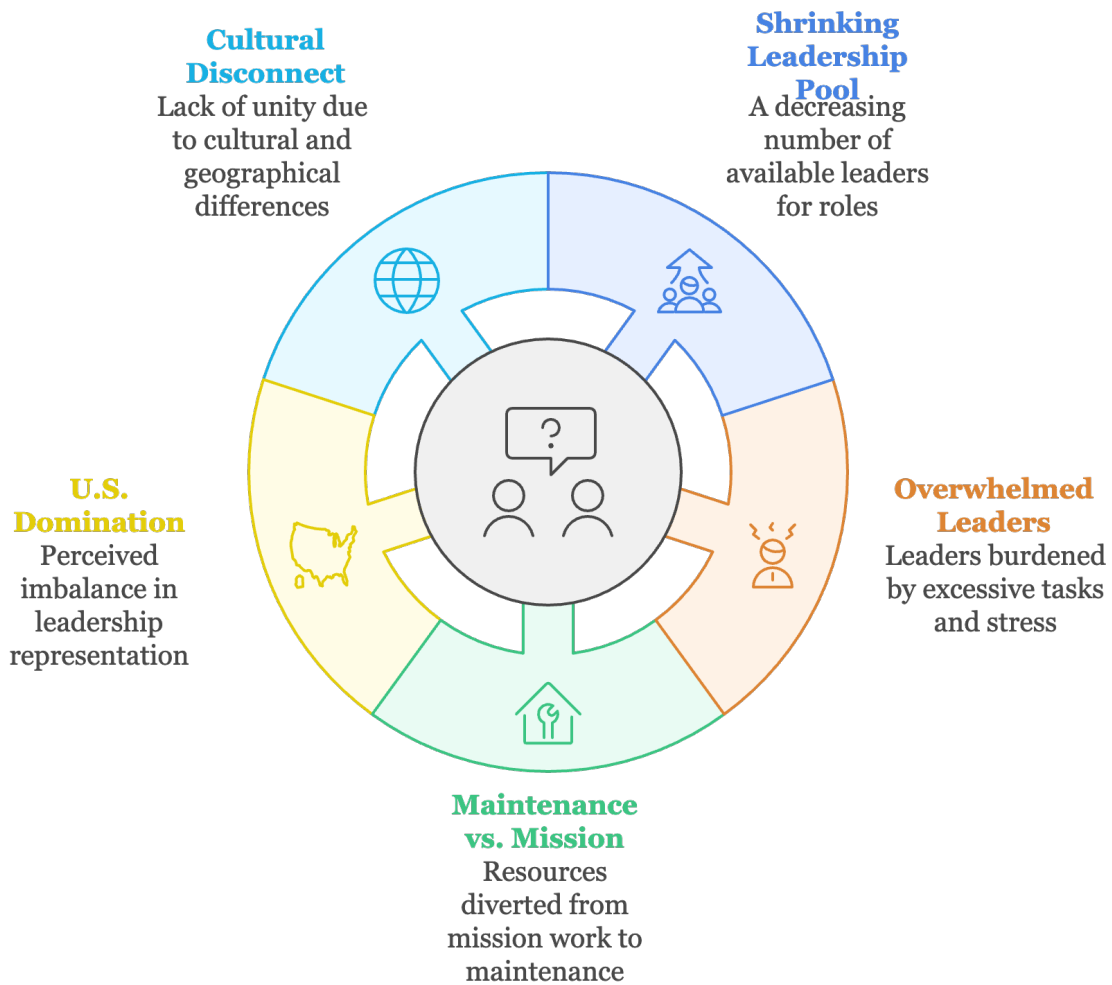
You received the summary results of these Regional Gatherings a week later and the entire compilation of results is on the portal. A few of the “Key Takeaways” were:

- **Collaborative Leadership:** There was a strong desire for a more collaborative approach between leaders and members and to move beyond the traditional hierarchical model.
- **Commitment to Participation:** Sisters want active involvement in Congregational processes, to be valued contributors to the life and mission in community, and to be a part of co-creating its future.
- **Desire for Transformation:** There is a strong desire for transformation within the congregation, even with its ambiguity on specific changes and their implications.

Hopefully, you’ve had a chance to review the synthesis and summaries from the Regional Gatherings. In short, there was a high level of engagement and excitement about opening up new possibilities for the way you govern your lives and relate as leaders and members. Clearly, there seems to be a certain level of discontent with the way things are and simultaneous enthusiasm to explore needed changes or transformation. And, no, we haven’t forgotten about the third critical issue – “vocations.” We will search for the best time to circle back to this issue as the Chapter journey continues.

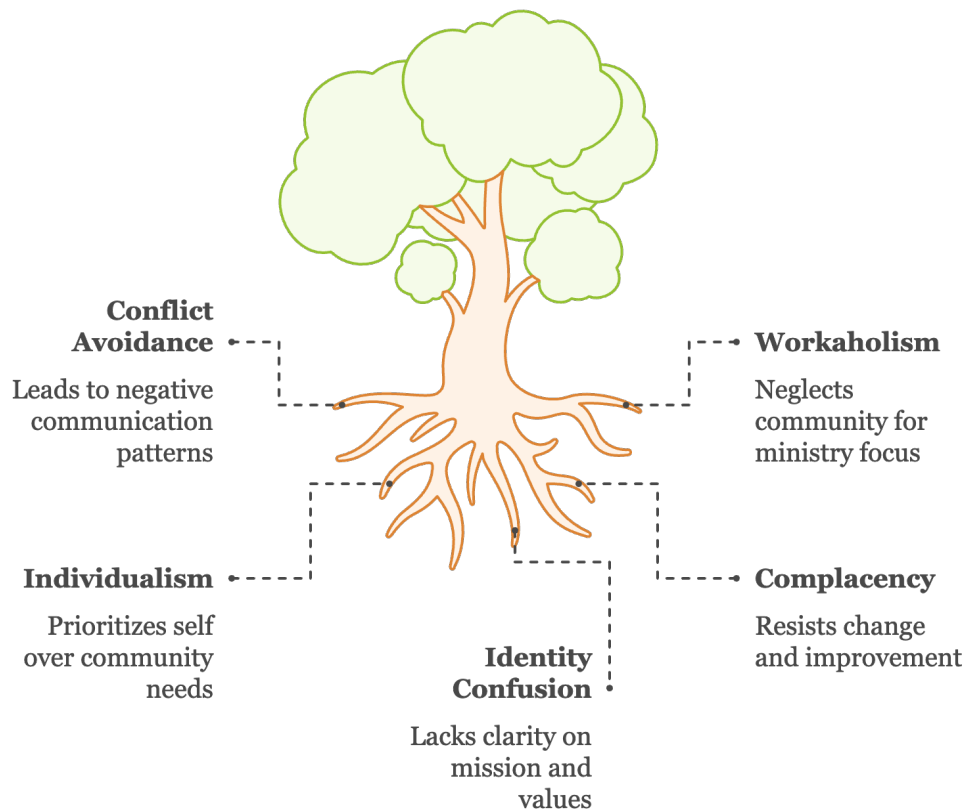
Rationale and motivation for change

When the CPC met to debrief the Regional Gatherings and plan your next steps, we returned to the question we have been asking all along: *Are you largely content with the way things are, or do you want to change, or possibly transform?* Which pathway, in other words, do you want to travel? Several key pieces of information and insights occurred to us in our debriefing.



During the Regional Gatherings, you were asked: “What are the problems in leadership you are trying to fix?” Here is what was shared:

1. Our demographics are such that we have a shrinking pool of recycled leadership.
2. Our congregational team of leaders is spread too thin. They are overwhelmed and stressed by all the administrative tasks and travel.
3. Maintenance needs are smothering the life out of mission. The resources, energy, and time needed just to maintain life as it is leaves little left over for mission or to think deeply and creatively about a vision for the future.
4. Our usual approach to surfacing names for discernment typically identifies few, if any, Brazilian sisters. This reinforces the perceived “U.S. Domination” and leaves a good portion of the Congregation out of the picture.
5. The disconnect between U.S. and Brazil, and to a lesser extent Jamaica, creates an experience of living parallel, independent lives rather than being in it together as one, whole, interdependent, unified Congregation. Our cultural, language, and geographical differences, and the ways we relate toward one another, continue to keep us disconnected from one another.



Beneath these more obvious and familiar themes are dynamics in your relationships that you recognized as undermining your desire for unity, wellbeing, and a greater sense of connection in community:

1. Conflict avoidance: leading to triangulation, blaming, criticizing, judging, passive-aggressive behaviors, and periodic outbursts of anger
2. Workaholism: a heavy focus on ministry to the relative neglect of community
3. Individualism: doing my own thing at the expense of community
4. Complacency: “I’ve paid my dues; I’m fine with the way things are”
5. Identity, Relevancy and Integrity: lack of clarity regarding who we are and what our mission is *today*

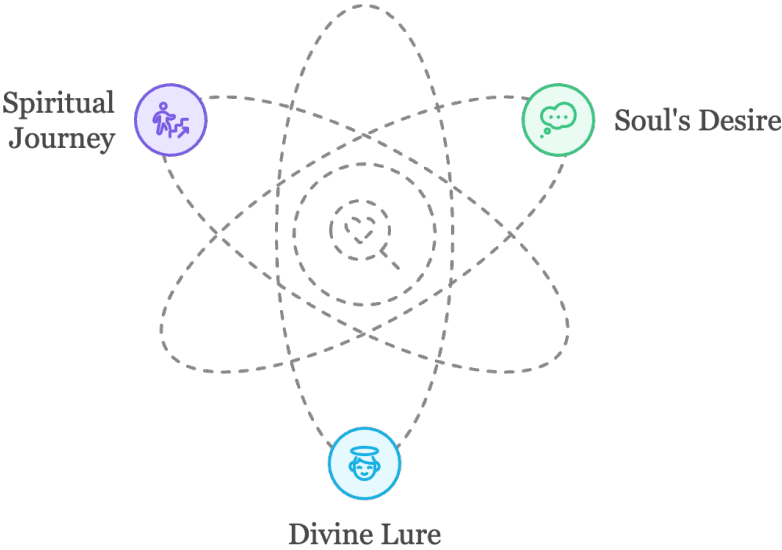
It appears that baggage continues to accumulate wounds on top of wounds. These are the kinds of interpersonal difficulties you say you’d like to “fix” and are ones that might compel you to change.

What is your North Star?

It is clear from what you have surfaced that there are plenty of things you'd like to change. The question remains: Beyond making the necessary changes you need to make to fix things, do you wish to transform your lives and give birth to new life? If you wish to take the ancient path and truly transform your lives, you will need a deeper motivation than merely fixing things that are no longer working.

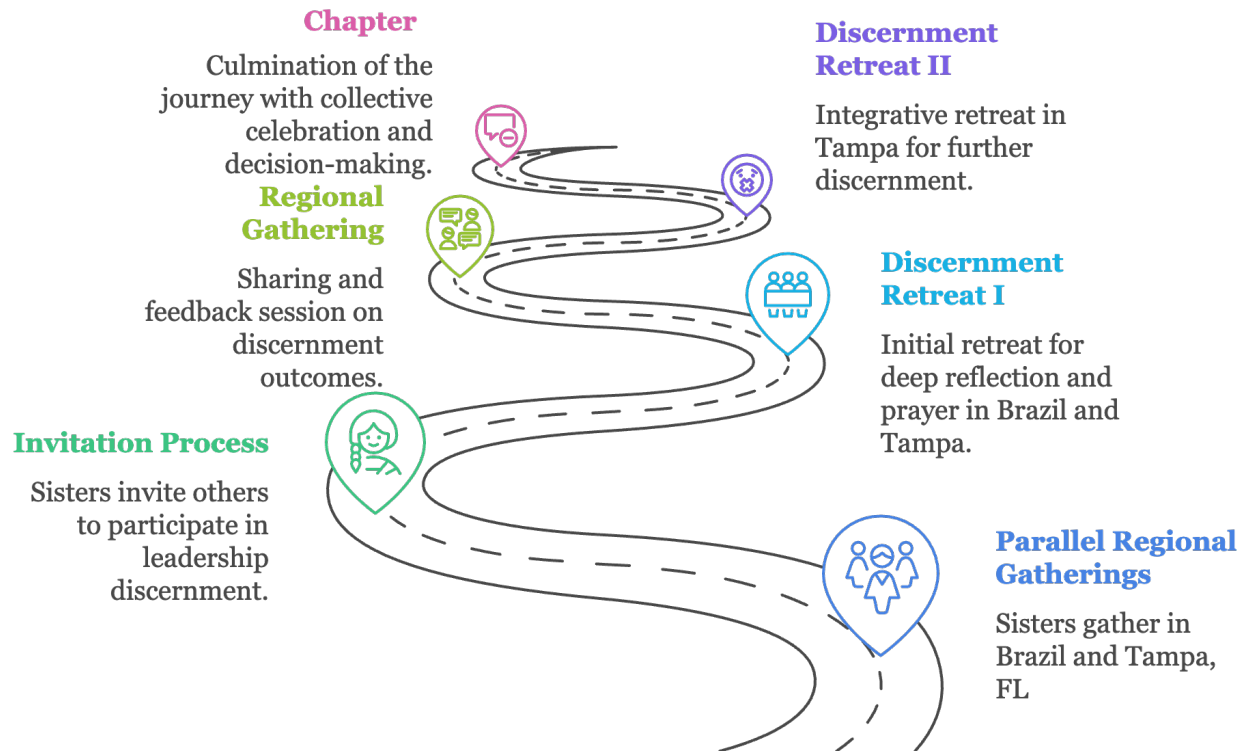
What are you truly seeking? These are the first words Jesus utters in the Gospel of John (1:38). It is the same question that was put before you in the very beginning of your work with Beth and me. It is a spiritual question that asks you to reflect upon your soul's desire. Transformation is a spiritual journey, a quest to respond to the lure and love of God, not a plan to fix things. This question has yet to be fully discerned, let alone answered. And it is important to let it linger in your soul and not force an answer before its time.

Journey of Transformation



We simply want to acknowledge that if you are to choose a path of transformation, it must be about more than a need to fix things. Fixing things will not be strong enough to sustain your motivation through the arduous journey of transformation. All the letting go and grieving that is required of transformation will feel empty, if there is no larger meaning and purpose. You will not transform your lives unless you genuinely believe that such transformation is Spirit-led. This shift in consciousness, from being compelled to fix things to being impelled by God's Love to transform your lives, is something we hope you will continue to explore and discern.

Chapter Journey: Next steps for Discernment and Elections



All of this is to say that we recognize your desire is to move beyond the status quo. You've heard Einstein's quote a lot these days because it so obvious and relevant in these times of transition: "You can't solve today's problems with the same mindset that created them." If you address the same problems with the same mindsets, heartsets and skillsets you have in the past, you will inevitably get the same results – status quo. Rather than trying harder in the same ways, you'll need to try things differently. You will need to think anew and act anew. Thus, here is what we are proposing to help you think and act anew as it pertains to your upcoming discernment and election.

1. Parallel Regional Gatherings (January 10 & 11)

The next Regional Gathering will be organized in similar way as the one you just had. In other words, it will be parallel Regional Gatherings. Simultaneously, Brazil with gather among themselves while the U.S., Jamaica and Bolivia are gathering with one another. The broad purpose of this Regional Gatherings will be to *understand and develop further your desired approach to leadership within the context of a newly emerging paradigm for the way you wish to govern your lives, live community and carry forth your mission*. The specific goals for these Regional Gatherings will be to:

1. Build upon the steps you have taken and to understand more deeply and further develop the possibilities of creating a new paradigm of governance.
2. Look at specific examples of alternative paradigms to stimulate your imagination and unearth creative possibilities for your own discernment.

3. introduce the process you will use for surfacing names of those sisters you wish to invite to discern the call to serve in leadership.

We believe it will help to strengthen the voices of those in Brazil, if each sister could surface the names of sisters from Brazil whom they want to call to discern the call to serve in Congregational leadership. We know that few people in Brazil, for instance, know the sisters in the United States well enough to discern well who might best serve in leadership (and vice versa). If you don't do this, you will end up with the same people in the same pool for same reasons as before, a pool dominated by U.S. sisters.

2. Invitation Process (February)

Following the Regional Gathering, an invitation process will be initiated. Each sister will invite and call forth sisters from their own country to engage in personal and communal discernment to serve in leadership. We want to cast a wide net to maximize the diversity and creative potential of this discerning group. The specific plans for this invitation process will be introduced and explained during the Regional Gathering.

3. Discernment Retreat I (March 6 – 9)

This first discernment retreat will be done in parallel fashion: sisters in Brazil will gather among themselves, while all others will gather in Tampa, Florida. Given the intimacy and creativity required for such an experience, these will be facilitated retreats and sisters must gather in person (not Zoom). Ted will direct the discernment in Brazil while Beth is directing the discernment in Tampa, Florida.

The purpose of this discernment retreat is to provide a sacred space for sisters to engage in deep reflection and prayer. It will focus on individual AND communal discernment, allowing participants to explore their spiritual journeys and seek clarity about how and to what they are being called. Guided activities, contemplative practices, and group discussions will facilitate a deeper understanding of personal callings AND the desired approach to leadership within a larger emerging paradigm.

These sisters will advance the Congregation's work that has been done in the prior January Regional Gatherings. They will take the seeds of possibilities for a new approach to leadership, and the preliminary understandings of an emerging paradigm, and discern how it resonates with their own discernment. In other words, they are searching out their own call to leadership and allowing that to simultaneously develop a new kind of leadership, a leadership they'd love to be a part of. It is a reciprocal interaction wherein the newly emerging paradigm and model of leadership are informed by their discernment, and their discernment is, likewise, informed by what is emerging.

We are asking everyone who receives a specific number of invitations to come to the retreat. We are asking those sisters who might wish to say "No Thanks" to come to this first discernment retreat. Those sisters, and their reasons for wanting to say "No," have important insights to share. Their "NO" is part of the equation, part of what ought to inform

a new way forward. Their reasons for saying “NO” are the very issues that must be addressed in order to create something more workable, something to which they might otherwise say “YES,” and could love being involved.

4. Regional Gathering (March 27 – 30)

The purpose of this next Regional Gathering is for everyone to listen and respond to those sisters who attended the Discernment Retreat. You will hear the fruits of their discernment and what it was like for them. They will share their “leanings” as to where they see themselves being called and they will ask for your feedback. They will share what they did to develop a new approach to leadership and a newly emerging paradigm of governance. Collectively, you will become one body in communal discernment, co-discerning WHO is being called and to WHAT. Everyone has a hand in shaping the result of this communal discernment and the creative work going forward.

Beyond leadership, additional work may be done attending to the other two “critical issues” (vocations and completion). Other issues that have yet to be surfaced will add to your vision for the future. While the specifics of this visioning effort are, as yet, unclear, it will be developed along the way.

These Regional Gatherings will be done, partly, in parallel fashion with each country gathered separately and, partly, together as one Congregation. The first part of the Regional Gatherings will be held separately with each country discerning in their own time and space. These gatherings must be done *in person* given the intimate nature of the discerning processes. The second part will include everyone across the Congregation, this time, out of necessity, using Zoom. This will allow you to integrate your efforts and experience yourselves engaged in communal discernment as one Congregation.

As a result of your Congregational discernment, those sisters who are clear, interiorly free, and at peace, and see themselves called in a direction other than leadership, will be blessed for the work they have done and will be free to withdraw from any further discernment. They will not attend the second discernment retreat. Those who continue to experience themselves as called to be part of a new paradigm of leadership and governance will attend the second discernment retreat. Additionally, those who are not yet clear, interiorly free or at peace (i.e., an indicator that their discernment is incomplete), will also attend the second discernment retreat.

5. Discernment Retreat II (May 15 – 18)

As with all the other steps, this second discernment retreat will build upon the prior steps. These sisters will pick up from where you left off at the prior Regional Gatherings regarding their personal discernment and the newly emerging paradigm of leadership and governance.

Unlike the first discernment retreat that was done separately in each country, this discernment retreat will be done together (not separated by country) and in person (not

Zoom). Sisters remaining in discernment, no matter their country of origin, will gather in Tampa for their retreat. The reason for this is to integrate each sister's personal discernment with the newly emerging paradigm of leadership and governance. They need to explore who could offer what kind of leadership for accomplishing what is emerging among the members of the Congregation. This discernment promises to be a highly intimate, challenging, supportive, creative, and bonding experience!

6. Chapter (July 27 – August 3)

The journey culminates in Chapter, where “All are welcome” online and in person. Deliberative participants, of course, will gather in person in Allegany. All participants, online and in person, will come together to celebrate their growth and discernment. The Chapter serves as a formal recognition of the collective journey undertaken by the Congregation.

Those who attended the second discernment will bring the fruits of their discernment and their further development of the emerging paradigm. The Chapter, much like in the prior Regional Gatherings, will hear the fruits of their discernment and what it was like for them. They will share their “leanings” as to where they see themselves being called and they will ask for your feedback. They will share what they did to further develop a new approach to leadership within the context of a newly emerging paradigm. Collectively, again, you become one body in communal discernment, co-discerning WHO is being called and to WHAT. Everyone will continue to shape the direction of this communal discernment and decisions about how you can move forward and create your future together.

The discernment will continue and will be entwined with the election process. Participants will share their commitments, articulate their visions for the future, and discuss how they will continue to support one another moving forward. The Chapter is a moment of culmination, marking not just the end of this journey, but the beginning of new possibilities for the Congregation. The journey of transformation continues...

