

Synthesis of Discerners' Suggestions

Regarding the Emerging Model of Leadership & Governance

The Discerners who met in Tampa (May 15 – 18) offered their responses to the *Emerging Model of Leadership & Governance* that came from your March Regional Gatherings. Below is a synthesis of their feedback regarding: **Wisdom Circles (WCs)**, **Guiding Team (GT)**, **Lay Participation**, **Congregational Leadership Team (CLT)**, **Regional Leadership Team (RLT)**, and **Transformation vs. Change**. Please review this synthesis after you have studied the *Emerging Model of Leadership & Governance* document. Share your reflections with your Small Group/Cluster Conversations.

1. Wisdom Circles (WCs)

Convergence:

- There is **strong support** for the creation of **Wisdom Circles (WCs)**, viewed as essential for **broadening leadership participation** and providing a platform for **sharing wisdom** across generations, cultures, and roles. The WCs are seen as a venue for **deepening the Congregation's sense of mission, spirituality, and community**, as well as other areas of desired focus. Multiple respondents emphasized that WCs could engage **sisters, lay associates, and mission partners**, allowing them to contribute meaningfully to the **direction and decision-making** of the Congregation.
- The WCs are recognized as **inclusive** spaces where **all sisters** of any age can participate, which aligns with the goal of **shared leadership** and **mutual responsibility**. Several responses specifically mentioned the potential for WCs to **offer direct links** to the **Congregational Leadership Team (CLT)**, ensuring **greater communication** and the **involvement of all members** in decision-making.

Divergence:

- There are divergent opinions on how WCs should be organized and **operationalized**. Some participants expressed the need for **clear guidelines** on the **topics** to be worked on within the WCs, suggesting that certain **themes** should be defined, while others felt WCs should be **flexible** and emerge based on **the grassroots needs**. There was also a suggestion for **cross-regional participation**, which would involve members from different countries or cultural backgrounds to promote **broader perspectives**.

- Some respondents questioned the need for **coordinators** to be selected in consultation with the regional leadership, suggesting that **members** of each WC should have more **autonomy** in selecting their WC coordinators (or co-coordinators). There were also concerns about ensuring that the WCs don't become too **large** and unwieldy, advocating for **co-coordinators** to manage the work effectively without **overloading** participants.
-

2. Guiding Team (GT)

Convergence:

- The **creation of a Guiding Team (GT)** received **mixed support**, but most respondents agreed that it could play an important role in **visioning**. The **GT** was seen as a potential vehicle for **connecting the WCs, RLTs, and CLT**, ensuring **coordinated action** and a **unified approach** to leader-member efforts across the Congregation.
- There is **general agreement** that the GT should serve as a space for **visioning** and **long-term planning**, allowing the Congregation to **shape its future** while **connecting regional insights** into the larger mission. The **GT's role** in gathering input from diverse groups and ensuring that the **local realities** are considered in **global decision-making** was also emphasized.

Divergence:

- A key point of divergence was the **composition** and **size** of the GT. Some respondents expressed concern that including both **coordinators of WCs** and **regional leaders** could result in a **large, unwieldy group**, which might make decision-making difficult. There was also **skepticism** about the necessity of the GT, with some suggesting that the **WCs themselves** could fulfill the **guidance role** without the need for an additional layer of leadership.
 - Several respondents raised concerns about the **clarity of the GT's role**, especially regarding its relationship to the **CLT** and **RLTs**. There were questions about whether the GT should be **advisory** or have a more **active decision-making** role. Others questioned whether the **regionals** should be included in the **CLT** or whether their involvement should be limited to the GT.
-

3. Lay Participation

Convergence:

- Lay participation in both **administrative** and **non-canonical leadership** roles is widely seen as **necessary** for the future of the Congregation. The involvement of **lay associates**, **mission partners**, and other **non-vowed members** was viewed as essential in light of the **aging membership** and the **need for professional expertise** in areas like **finance**, **communications**, and **healthcare**.
- There was strong support for the involvement of **laity** in role, such as, **CFO**, **healthcare coordination**, and other operational roles that traditionally fell to the sisters. This would free up the sisters to focus on more on **mission**, **pastoral**, **spiritual**, and **formation roles**, while still maintaining a strong **spiritual leadership** presence in the Congregation.

Divergence:

- While there is consensus on the necessity of **lay participation**, some respondents emphasized the need for **clear boundaries** between **canonical** and **non-canonical** roles. **Lay leaders** should be well-trained in the **Franciscan charism** and **values**, but their authority and responsibilities must be **well-defined** to avoid conflicts or confusion with the Congregation's **spiritual leadership**.
- Concerns were raised about the **spiritual and pastoral care** that lay people might not fully understand or embody. Some participants noted that **formation** in the **Congregation's charism** would be critical to ensure that lay leaders do not become overly **business-oriented** but remain aligned with the **mission** and **values** of the Congregation.

4. Congregational Leadership Team (CLT)

Convergence:

- **Consensus** was strong regarding the need for a **Congregational Leadership Team (CLT)** that includes **elected members** and **regional ministers**. Most respondents agreed that the CLT should consist of **4 to 5 elected members** at the Chapter as well as **Regional Ministers** from **Brazil**, **Jamaica**, and the **U.S.** This hybrid structure ensures that **regional voices** are heard and that the **global mission** remains integrated with local needs.
- This model is seen as an effective way to balance **global**, **congregational** governance with **regional representation** and **multi-cultural sensitivity**.

Divergence:

- There were some differences in opinion regarding the **size** of the CLT. While some respondents favored a **larger team** (7-8 members) to ensure broader input, others preferred a smaller, more focused group to avoid **decision-making bottlenecks**.
 - The role of **regional ministers** was also debated, particularly regarding whether they should be part of the CLT or serve in a more **advisory role**. Some felt that **too many leaders in governance** could dilute the focus of the Congregation's work, while others emphasized the importance of **regional voices** in ensuring that decisions are informed by **local realities**.
-

5. Regional Leadership Team (RLT)

Convergence:

- There is widespread agreement on the importance of **regional leadership** to ensure that the needs of each **region** are represented in the Congregation's leadership and decision-making. **Frequent communication** between **regional leadership teams** and the **Congregational Leadership Team** is seen as vital to maintaining **unity** and **shared vision** across the Congregation.
- The connection between the **RLTs** and the **Guiding Team (GT)** is considered essential for **visioning** and ensuring that the **regional realities** are included in **global decisions**.

Divergence:

- There is some ambiguity about whether the **RLTs** should be included in the **CLT** or whether their participation should be limited to the **Guiding Team**. Some respondents argue for **lessening the burden** on regional leaders by having them contribute to the **Guiding Team** rather than the **CLT** directly, which could reduce the **administrative load** and allow more time for **local leadership**.
-

6. Transformation or Change

Convergence:

- There is a strong consensus that **transformation** is a vital process for the Congregation's future. Respondents agree that transformation should include **shifting from traditional**

leadership structures to a more **inclusive** and **collaborative** model. This involves **lay participation**, **shared responsibility**, and the **empowerment of local leadership**.

- The need for **ongoing dialogue** and **mutual discernment** about the Congregation's mission and future is emphasized. Several respondents also noted that transformation should not just be about structure but also about fostering a **deeper spiritual commitment** to the **Franciscan charism**.

Divergence:

- Some respondents felt that **gradual change** would be more appropriate, emphasizing the need to **preserve** the **traditional foundations** of the Congregation while adapting to contemporary needs. Others felt that more **radical change** was necessary to prepare the Congregation for a future where **lay leadership** plays a much larger role in administration.

Summary Conclusion

The feedback reveals **strong alignment** around the vision of a **collaborative, inclusive leadership structure** that empowers both **sisters** and **lay members** to contribute meaningfully to the Congregation's life and mission. **Wisdom Circles** and **regional leadership teams** are seen as crucial to maintaining **grassroots participation** and ensuring that the **local realities** are addressed in decision-making. The creation of a **Guiding Team** to **connect and coordinate** the work of the WCs and RLTs is generally supported, though the size and composition of the team still require careful consideration.

However, there are key areas of **divergence**, particularly around the **number of leaders** in the **Congregational Leadership Team**, the **role of regional ministers**, and the **extent of lay involvement** in leadership roles. Further **discussion and clarification** are needed to ensure that **governance structures** remain **flexible, inclusive**, and capable of fostering the Congregation's **spiritual and operational growth**. Ultimately, the Congregation is being called to embrace **mutual responsibility** and **shared leadership** while remaining true to its **Franciscan charism**.