

Reflection of Jo Streva – July 27, 2024

Looking back 3 years ago to Chapter 2021 and the first few months of serving as a councilor, I especially recall the perspective of “newness” we were trying to articulate and promote through our earliest efforts. We had experienced a first virtual Chapter — we were a smaller leadership group, 2 of us as first-time leaders, 2 were experienced leaders, and we were living in 3 separate locations. Out of necessity, we quickly became zoom experts for our interactions.

The Chapter vision for LISTENING AND MOVING FORWARD IN RESPONSE centered upon the Congregation’s mandate to launch a process for personal and communal TRANSFORMATION. Much of what we read and discussed before, during and after Chapter encouraged us to imagine and explore how this Journey would take shape.

When we engaged with Ted and Beth Dunn in early 2022, we were made aware of the long-term commitments of time, travel, and resources that would be needed to enable us as a Congregation to embrace the inner and outer work of transformation. Each of us agreed and eagerly supported this step into CARE (which began with Facilitator training in February 2023) at the Franciscan Center in Tampa. These series of CARE trainings continued throughout every area of the Congregation, and many Associates and Partners in Mission have also participated, here in Allegany and in Jamaica. Together, we have taken concrete steps along this challenging path of a collective Transformative Journey.

As the eldest member of the Leadership group, I soon discovered that frequent travel for week-long meetings in various states or countries was not a healthy option for me. My participation in CARE did not include 3 of the 7 training locations, specifically New Jersey, Brazil or the current training here. On the other hand, my 4 experiences of CARE in Tampa, Allegany and Jamaica solidified my personal and communal commitment to press on toward a fuller and more intentional acceptance of transformation.

My personal decision about travel limitations allowed opportunities for more personal presence with our sisters and sponsored ministries in Florida. I have been directly involved with the Franciscan Center Board and staff and have actively supported their many local activities. As liaison for the Associate Program, I have affirmed the Florida Co-Directors, Colleen and Linda, with their growing membership and future visioning of the Associate Program becoming an Associate Way of Life.

When Congregational Leadership met with sisters in Florida earlier this year about the future stewardship of the Perry Avenue properties, I was able to assist personally at St. Elizabeth Convent with transition details, and have continued to work with the Franciscan Center staff in overseeing the needs at the Convent during this year of exploring potential repurposing of St. Elizabeth Convent.

As to Congregational matters requiring full leadership discussion and decisions, we primarily engaged via Zoom. Although we were connected in conversation, I sensed that some decision-making required more discernment and time to consider alternatives. Truthfully, the amount of remote participation caused a disconnect for me among the four of us. Although we tried to keep one another apprised of developing situations or spontaneous discussions, there were occasions when the context was lost or misunderstood. Such misinterpretations can be damaging and hurtful, both individually, and to the overall effectiveness of the group.

When personal presence is not possible due to legitimate circumstances, the effort to catch up with situations becomes draining. I often thought that my perspective was clouded or incomplete regarding some issues. Gradually, the value of my suggestion, my opinion, or my voice became less noticed or affirmed. Feeling marginalized from the group, the gaps in shared information became barriers to clarity of purpose for me.

As an elected Congregational councilor, I have been committed to collaboration and involvement by contributing to the whole for the good of all. However, my inability to travel as much as expected of us, painfully limited that commitment for me.

My learnings from this experience of isolation have opened my mind and heart to the need for affirming personal presence and participation at any age and with any limitation. Each of us has a personal mission to be her best self! Of the many decisions facing us, I pray that we will ponder the best path forward to ensure full participation in the work of shaping our future together, across the Congregation, and within each country.

How can we strengthen our sense of connectedness and unity when, because of our geographical spread or other circumstances, we cannot gather in person? How will we as leaders, members, associates and partners in mission, mutually encourage, engage, and empower one another?